

Claire Kahn's necklace of crocheted cylindrical Miyuki glass beads with turquoise and silver is from her July "Temptations" exhibition.

COURTESY OF PATINA GALLERY



A VERY GOOD YEAR

A look back at ten of 2011's most intriguing shows and artists

By KATE MCGRAW
For the Journal

One thing about the end of another calendar year — it provides a perfect time to stop and look back. Another 52 weeks of features about gallery openings in Santa Fe proves that this is an interesting and consistently striving art town. Some shows — and the artists the exhibits have spotlighted — linger in memory longer than others. This is a completely subjective and perhaps illogical catalog of shows and/or artists who caught the fancy in 2011. In chronological order, then:

JOHN FEODOROV, "EMERGENCE," SOLO SHOW
VISION PROJECT Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 108 Cathedral Place

Feodorov's first show in Santa Fe since 1989 displayed the Seattle-based Navajo-European artist's conceptual-art path. "Two years ago, a friend gave me a bunch of teddy bears in a bag, and said, 'Make art of that,'" he said. "So I did."

The biggest piece in his January show, aptly titled "Ambiguity," included a dozen bears that Feodorov took the stuffing out of. "They're kind of flattened, like road kill," he said, chuckling. "And there's this big teddy bear that sort of hovers over them that I made out of the stuffing from all of the unstuffed bears." The big teddy bear, he explained, was kind of like a spirit of the reduced bears. The exact size of the piece depended on the space to install it, he added. "It varies in dimensions." At this show at what used to be the IATA Museum, it was pretty darn big.

The ambiguity, Feodorov said, sprang partly from his own attempts to merge his mixed heritage. Feodorov has been dealing with issues of identity and labeling for his nearly 50 years. Born in Los Angeles, he spent summers at his grandparents' homestead in the White Horse region of New Mexico. The dichotomy of time spent on the Navajo reservation and the rest of the year in the California suburbs of Whittier exerted an important influence. He has been constantly trying and questioning ideas of spirituality, identity and place.

ROBERT NATKIN, "THE ARCHITECTURE OF ATMOSPHERES," SURVEY OF DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS
LewAllen Galleries downtown, 125 W. Palace Ave.

This was one of two posthumous shows that fascinated this year. Those of us who never knew this man apparently missed a treat. Natkin (1930-2010) loved singing gospel songs, and making mischief: according to his daughter and other sources, he once removed a painting by Nicolas Poussin from a wall inside the Art Institute of Chicago, hid it behind a velvet curtain and replaced it with one of his own. When no one noticed the joke, he switched the paintings back.

When he died a year ago at age 79 of a hospital-induced infection, the art world lost one of its major players, an artist considered "a salient figure in the history of Post-war American painting," Alex Ross, art consultant of LewAllen Galleries, said.

Natkin's spirituality and his deep well of humor could be found in his paintings and drawings in the June show. So could his sensual love of color. He was known for layering bright acrylic colors and forms on large-scale canvases that combined the playfulness of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky with the palettes of Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard. LewAllen's large-scale survey traced Natkin's development into what the eminent historian Edward Lucie-Smith described in *Artoday* as "the ultimate development" in American Art Modernism.

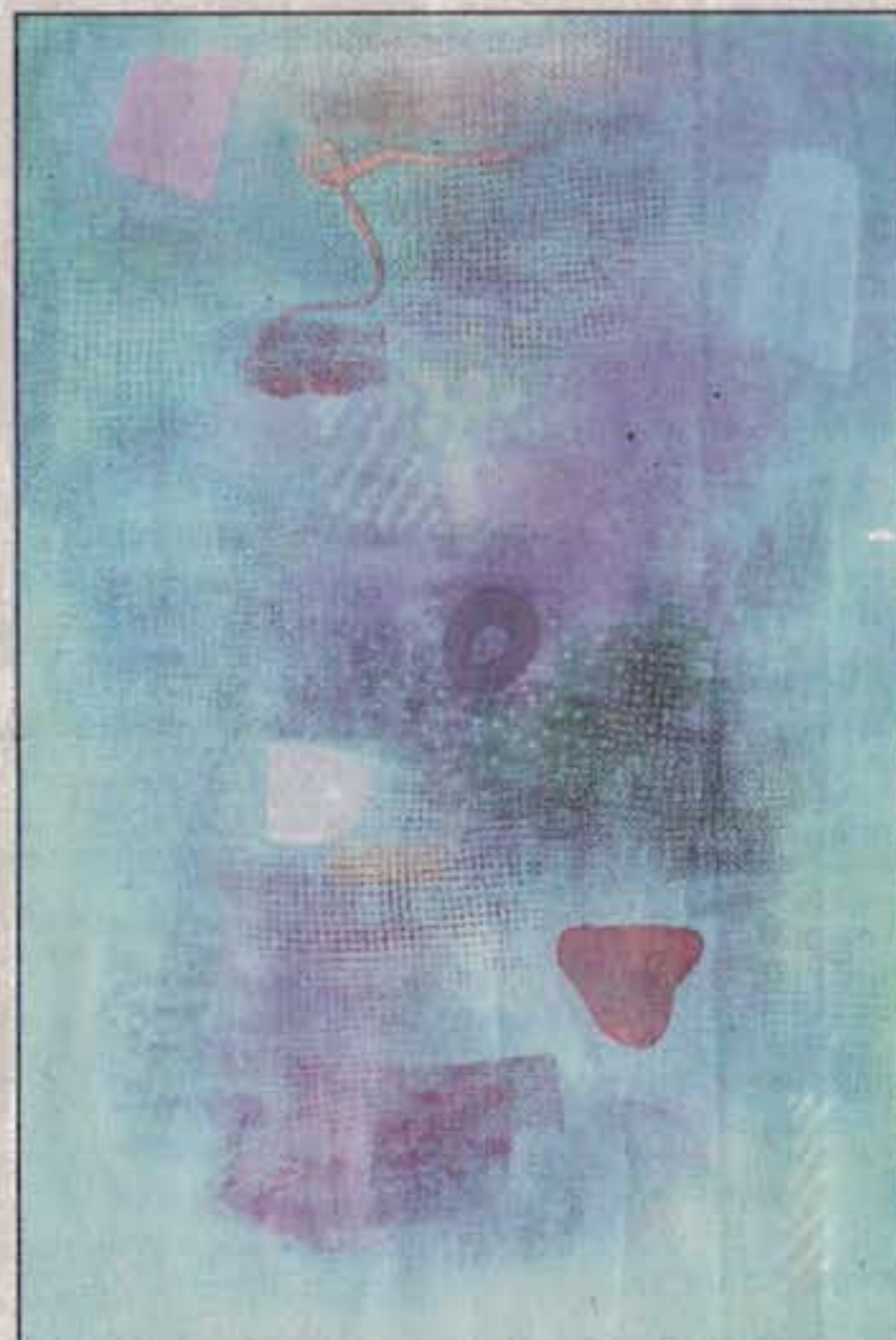
JOHN SONSINI, "LOS VAQUEROS," SOLO EXHIBIT
James Kelly Contemporary, 1601 Paseo de Peralta

The Latin American immigrants in their vaquero clothing looked out from John Sonsini's portraits with a curious intensity. It is an intensity, the artist said, born of commitment. Sonsini paints his sitters from life, using a wet-on-wet process that involves laying on



COURTESY OF ADDISON ROWE GALLERY

"New Hampshire Town" is a 1931 watercolor and gouache on paperboard by German-born American modernist Oscar Bluemner (1867-1938).



COURTESY OF LEWALLEN GALLERIES

"Intimate Lightning" is a 1973 acrylic on canvas by Robert Natkin (1930-2010).



COURTESY OF JAMES KELLY CONTEMPORARY

"Roger and Francisco" is a 2011 oil on canvas by John Sonsini.

A Year of Memorable Shows, Artists

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(and often removing) a lot of paint so it stays wet from day to day.

"Painting from life is a unique process," Sonsini said. "You have two people coming together to do a job. That relationship becomes unlike any other relationship in your life. That's really the root of why my paintings look the way they do, is that connection with another person to do this job. I think they have dignity, yes, but they have dignity naturally. I prefer the word 'intensity.' That makes sense. It's a very, very intense process."

A show of Sonsini's vaquero portraits from his neighborhood in Los Angeles opened in June at James Kelly Contemporary in the Railyard. It was Sonsini's first solo exhibition at the gallery. The portraits of his neighbors were haunting and remain so.

CLAIRE KAHN, "TEMPTATIONS," JEWELRY
Patina Gallery, 131 W. Palace Ave.

Growing up with parents who valued both artful design and meticulous craftsmanship, Claire Kahn naturally applied both in her fine-art jewelry. To create her extraordinary "snakes," ropes and embellished circles, she strung tiny Miyuki glass beads because their uniform size permitted distinct margins and a strict delineation of pattern. Her craftsmanship is so exacting that it can take a day to crochet just a few inches.

Preparing for her July show at Patina, Kahn talked about her fascination with transitions, which she called "the edge," the moment when change occurs. In the patterns she created, one element segued into another, transitioning smoothly and evolving subtly. "It starts one way and ends another and getting there ... there's a mathematical beauty, a series of numbers that so elegantly fall into place," the artist said. "When the numbers are elegant, I know that it will be beautiful."

PETER CAMPBELL, "LAND AND LIGHT," PAINTINGS
Meyer East Gallery, 225 Canyon Road

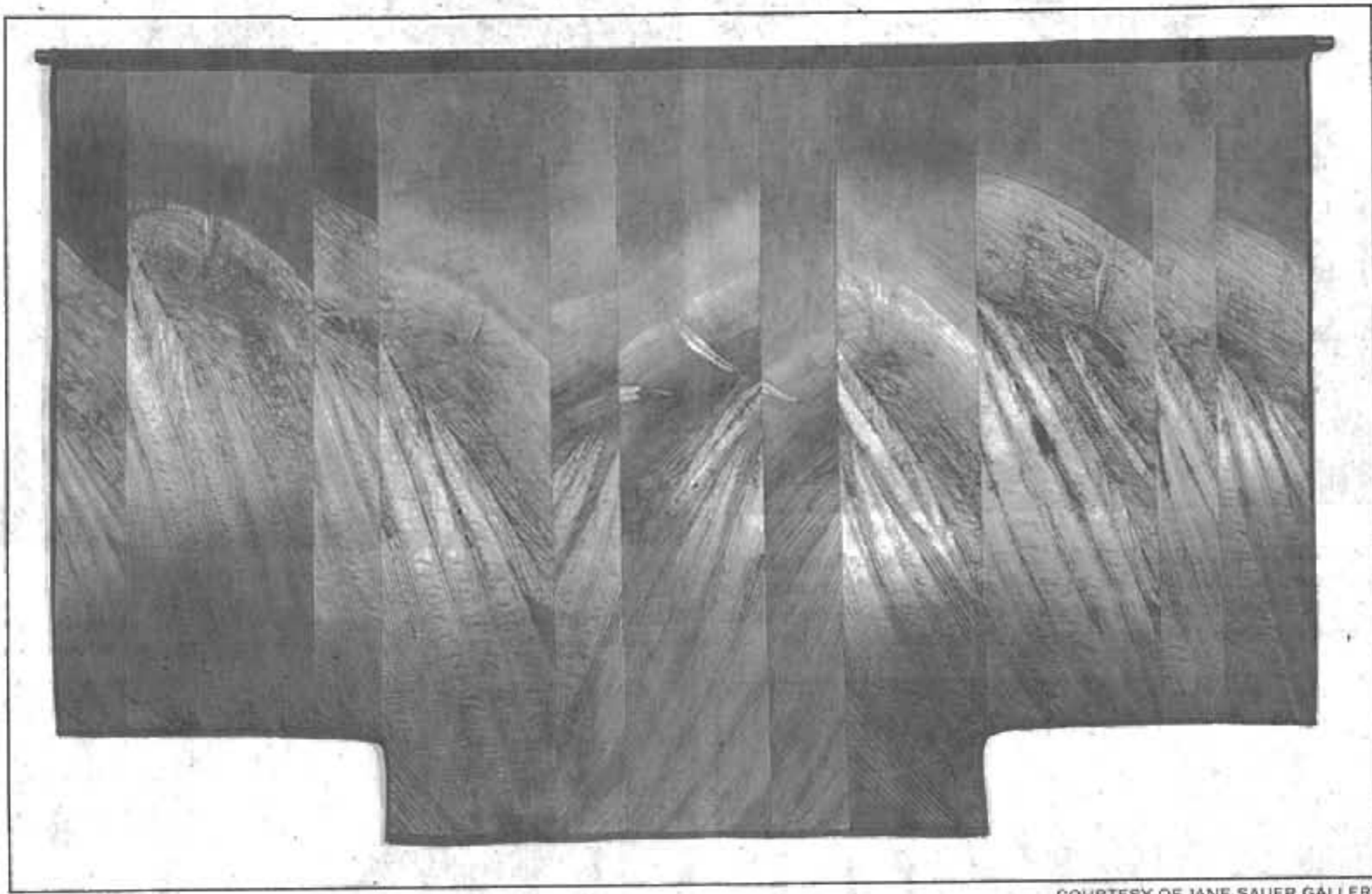
This show of Campbell's Southwestern landscapes opened in July at Meyer East Gallery on Canyon Road. Although Campbell teaches workshops on portraits, still lifes and plein air painting, this show was all landscapes of hushed quiet times of day — dawn, twilight and moonlight. The Meyer East show had a lot of desert pieces that were fairly new, the artist said. "I spent some time down at Abiquiu and out toward Monument Valley. I was really attracted to the light and color out there."

"My work is more investigative than thematic," he commented. "Seeing the work more as a blending of poetry and representation, I found myself making paintings in different methods. Some pieces are started traditionally with block-ins that developed from drawings, while others are started with abstractions that became worked up in layers."

Moving from the American Southeast to the American Southwest made a painter of Campbell, the artist said. "I grew up in North and South Carolina, but I've been living in Durango (Colo.) for 16 years," Campbell, 48, said. "Even though I started as a photographer, I'd wanted to be a painter for years. Moving here made it all happen. I really loved the landscape when I visited out here. It made a huge difference. When you find something that inspires you, that's when your painting takes off. Out here, it's real open, with big skies and I really love the desert. This was the place to come, and it inspired me enough to really learn how to paint. By the time I moved here, I wasn't really painting full time. After moving here I started painting all the time. Having an overwhelming amount of things to paint made that happen."

OSCAR BLUEMNER "LITTLE GEMS," DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLORS
Addison Rowe Fine Art, 229 E. Marcy St.

This second posthumous show that was interesting



Judith Content's hand-dyed and quilted silk wall piece "Torrent" was part of her "Desert Rain: Works on Silk" show last October at Jane Sauer Gallery.

opened in August at Addison Rowe. This artist, who died a suicide in 1938, was no funny imp like Natkin.

Bluemner, Victoria Addison acknowledged, had "a very sad life. He was always starving, and he was eventually quite depressed and took his life."

"But even though he was a sad person, his art was in no way sad," she said. "He put a lot into small spaces. He put a lot of magic into his work, using shapes, angles and color. He was very intellectual about his art, very methodical."

After six years in the gallery business in Santa Fe, Addison said she believed Santa Fe was ready for a completely modernist show. That's why she spent months collecting enough works for a show of watercolor/gouache paintings and crayon drawings by Bluemner, an eminent abstract modernist Oscar. "Most of his oils are in private collections; I worked months to put this collection together," the veteran gallerist said.

"I must have been channeling him and his love of color," Addison added with a laugh. "Getting ready to hang this show, I was guided by something to paint one wall red and another blue." The well-hung show did him credit.

GARY FAIGIN AND THE ELI LEVIN DRAWING GROUPS
Argos Studio, 1211 Luisa St.

It's always nice to see Eli Levin and his fellow artists back in the mix. Longtime Santa Fe artist Levin celebrated his new studio and gallery on Luisa Street with a tripartite show of drawings in August. There was a one-man show of Levin drawings, another small exhibit of drawings by guest artist Gary Faigin of Seattle and a larger show of drawings by 30 members of the Eli Levin Studio drawing classes. All of the drawings were nudes.

Levin and his business partner Eric Thomson maintained Argos Studio and Gallery and Eli Levin Studio and Gallery across the street from each other on Canyon Road for many years. They relinquished both properties earlier in 2011 and consolidated in the building on Luisa Street, just south of Cordova Road.

"We have a small gallery in front, and a good-sized studio and work space behind — and we even have parking," Levin said. The studio space, directed by Thomson, is the venue for Levin's three drawing classes and one etching class. He's maintained one drawing class since 1969 and the etching class since 1981. The lively work coming out of this man's intense love-affair with art makes Santa Fe richer.

ANN CHERNOW, "ALL THAT JAZZ," FILM NOIR DRAWINGS
Dorothy Rogers Fine Art (Design Center), 410 Cerrillos Road

Another valuable element of

the Santa Fe art scene bit the dust this year when Dorothy Rogers closed her longtime gallery at the Design Center. She did it with a bang, though — a bang-up September show of drawings by her erstwhile art teacher and great friend Ann Chernow, the same artist who began Roger's career as a gallerist 36 years ago.

These 16 forceful drawings of women in film — is that Joan Crawford? Dorothy Malone? — brought an amazing energy to a sad occasion. Celebratory, really. And it's likely you can still see a repeated Chernow on Rogers' website, which she's keeping alive: www.drogerscollection.com.

VARIOUS ARTISTS, "AUTUMN GOLD, NEW MEXICO: PAINTINGS OF THE SEASON, 1920-1970"

William R. Talbot Fine Art, Antique Maps and Prints, 129 W. San Francisco St. (second floor)

Talbot is a 25-year Santa Fe dealer in rare maps and vintage prints, but in October he showed an unusual exhibit of paintings by artists influenced by New Mexico's famous autumn. He had gathered and curated the paintings from among his friends in the art dealing business. The exhibit displayed first of all Talbot's exquisite taste.

"Autumn is a nice season everywhere," Talbot said, "but here in New Mexico, it's downright famous. In fact, for

those of us who live here, it's a precious time."

Talbot called on longtime pals in the art business — Richard Lampert, Mark Zaplin, Nat Owings, John Wright Schaefer and Aaron Payne, among others — to share some favorite paintings by well-known mid-to-late-20th-century artists.

"This show is the result of great cooperation and collaboration," he said. "I knew where to go," he said. "I made a few phone calls to friends and went to see what they had. It was pretty easy to do. It was kind of like going shopping for myself. I thought, 'If I were going to collect New Mexico autumn paintings, what would I choose?'"

His selection was impeccable: no painting in the show cost more than \$50,000, he said, even though there were paintings from some very famous and historic artists, including Josef Bakos, Emil Bisttram, Gustave Baumann, Fremont Ellis, Eric Gibberd, William Lumpkins, Ila McAfee, Alfred Morang, Lloyd Moylan, Helmuth Naumer, Sheldon Parsons, Carl Redin, Ben Turner and Stuart Walker.

It was a selling show, he emphasized. No word on how much art sold, but it had to have been considerable. Many of the paintings were breathtaking in their evocation of our splendid fall.

JUDITH CONTENT, "DESERT

RAIN: WORKS ON SILK"
Jane Sauer Gallery, 652 Canyon Road

Jane Sauer is another gallerist whose implacable pursuit of excellence can be found in the many artists/craftsmen whom she exhibits throughout the year. One four-de-force this year was the October exhibit of works on silk by Judith Content.

Content constructs large wall panels with a palette of various silk fabrics created using a traditional Japanese dye technique called arashi-shibori. As practiced in Japan, fabric was tightly wrapped and compressed on long polished wooden poles. The threads used to secure the fabric to the pole as well as the manipulated pleats resist the penetration of dye. It seems to be kind of the original tie-dye. Patterns reminiscent of wind-driven rain emerged from this process, which may be why the dye process was named arashi, which translates as the word "storm" in Japanese.

For more than 30 years Content has been exploring and refining this ancient technique, creating a contemporary approach. She has devised her own ways of wrapping and applying the dye. Her palette is not only traditional indigo but a broad spectrum of colors using beautiful Japanese myakozome dyes. Her process creates subtle gradations of color that merge and morph into each other. The viewer cannot always tell when and how one color becomes another. Content also at times removes layers of color through a gentle bleaching process.

Silk is the natural fabric that takes dye best, so Content uses silk for her extraordinary dyed and quilted panels. This new Content show of works that sprang from a visit to the Bosque de Apache.

"I use several types of silk in my work," Content said. "I use Thai Silk because it has a crisp architectural hand that lends itself beautifully to the intricate pleating I do prior to dyeing. I also use silk Charmeuse from France, which has a lovely sheen and graceful drape. Other silks include raw silk, pongee, silk dupioni and silk satin, silks that have a variety of interesting surface textures. I like to juxtapose these silks together in a piece, creating lively, if subtle, textural contrasts."

"Silk takes the dye like no other fiber on earth," the artist added. "The colors I can achieve on silk range from the most vibrant hues imaginable, to bare whispers of color. It's a joy to work with, touch and manipulate. Silk is also extremely strong and durable."