

## **JAN ARONSON, SUBJECTIVE REALISM 2005**

## **MIRANDA MCLINTIC, CATALOG ESSAY 2005**

Endowing her subjects with an almost supernatural uniqueness, while retaining the factual data that she obtains from photographs, Jan Aronson creates portraits of mountains, deserts, creeks, clouds, leaves, and people. The images are selected and composed (for the most part) through the lens of her camera, and then transformed by oil on canvas -- as well as by watercolor or pastel on paper -- to reveal her own way of seeing and her sensual engagement with the act of painting. Like many twenty-first century realists, Aronson's work is more about ways of seeing than about what is represented.

Jan Aronson is equally a realist, formalist, and an abstract painter in her methods and concerns. She perceives and intensifies the abstract quality of form color and light that she sees in natural phenomena. Selecting subjects that are meaningful to her, she paints to find out what will happen in the course of translating reality from photos and personal associations into art. This time-consuming, highly skilled process is a defiant assertion of traditional artistic craft in an age of virtual reality. Recalling a statement by Dorothea Rockburn that "a painting is finished when it speaks to me," Aronson believes that she knows when a work is done because it separates from you when you have given it everything you have to give.

## LANDSCAPES

Jan Aronson is a post-modern realist (except as a portraitist) because she depicts experience as mediated by the photographs that she takes to paint the exotic vistas, ocean views, and woodland scenes that constitute the vast majority of her work. "My reverence for nature has compelled me, through the years, to search for material for my work. I take photographs and then use these images like a sketch, bringing them to my studio as the genesis for paintings. I am not interested in making a replica of either the photograph of the scene in nature but to find out how I see, to work at finding solutions to challenging painting problems, and to create my own idiosyncratic painted worlds."

Having been trained, like many of her peers, as an abstract expressionist, and having painted abstractly for twenty years, Aronson began her landscapes during a 1985 trip to the deserts in Israel. Since then, she has worked in remote locations such as the Himalayas, Amazonian rain forest, the Sinai and Baja desert, Peru, Patagonia and Canadian Rockies, as well on Caribbean beaches, in the woods of Virginia and Vermont, and the mountains of Idaho. She combines her love of the outdoors with her quest for new sites that open new possibilities for her work.

Aronson's paintings depict specific times, spaces and naturalistic details while evoking psychological and spiritual states through color and rhythmic design. She perceives the abstract qualities in nature and intensifies them. Comparing Death Valley #14 from 1986 with the photograph that the artist took at that location, reveals the intriguing mix of methodical recording and almost surreal imagination that characterizes her best landscapes. Having studied geology as an undergraduate at the University of New Orleans, Aronson accurately represents the craggy contours and roughly striated surface of the barren hillsides, but then replaces the multi-toned gray colors of the rocky landscape seen in the photograph with intense yellows, oranges, and purples to convey her highly charged memory of this site.

The landscapes that she painted in the Himalayas in 1989 and 1991 capture the otherworldly beauty of that wilderness, as well as the alienation of human beings from their vertical heights, sheer slopes and rocky surfaces. Although the forms of these stark mountain-scapes would be recognizable to those who know them, the scenes are painted with lurid shades of yellow, red, green, blue, brown and purple and defined by hallucinatory linear configurations that define their magical intoxication. All these are close-up panoramas of Aronson's mind's view of the grandeur of nature at its extreme.

More familiar, but equally immediate in impact, are the series of paintings and pastels focused on rushing water from 1993 and 1994. Aronson conveys the sound and the power of water in O'Brien's Waterfall in Canada and Bench Creek and Farley Creek in Idaho, through contrasts of solid form and movement, naturalistic representation and abstract line, and light and dark. Carefully composed to keep the images on the surface so that the water pours into the viewers' space, these scenes are both animated and paradoxically frozen in time. Looking at the photograph that preceded O'Brien's Waterfall #4 makes clear the representational accuracy of Aronson's art, as well as its iconic quality.

## SKYSCAPES

Italian Baroque painters of the seventeenth century painted clouds as the visible representations of celestial glory – a realm between heaven and earth -- whereas Gustave Courbet's nineteenth century cloud studies are considered by many to be the earliest examples of abstract art. The rest of us look up to see clouds that look like elephants and mountains, or view heavenly rays that separate white clouds from dark, hoping for new possibilities. Clouds represent human aspirations and dreams. They are awesome and delicate, powerful and ephemeral.

Jan Aronson's theatrical skylscapes combine the sublimity of religious paintings, the drama of romantic painting, and the specificity of photographs. Although clouds are always in a state of transition, Aronson captures compelling configurations in photographs, combines individual pictures, and crops them into compositions that she paints in the form of triptychs.

Painting clouds is a deductive process for Aronson. She considers it as a painting problem that she is curious about and feels that the process of interpreting these ephemeral phenomena is freer than when representing a subject that has a fixed identity.

The triptych format alludes to religious prototypes, as well as being theatrical. Aronson's combination of three images in one structure dramatizes the metamorphic character of her subject. In *Cloud Triptych #24* (1999), the center panel, luscious pinks, blues, greys, blacks and whites create a full-blown romantic representation of a stormy sky with the sun breaking through, which seems to be the culmination or source of the smaller scenes on both sides. Very differently, the acrobatic quality of the lightly brushed white clouds in her *Cloud Triptych #38* (2000) is reinforced by the continuity of the deep blue sky across the three panels and the compression of the smaller horizontal central picture between two larger images of fast moving clouds.

## LEAVES

Jan Aronson began painting leaves in response to 9/11, seeing them as "In Memoriam, an homage to the tragedy" having walked around Ground Zero three weeks after the event where she was struck by a slash of red rust on the façade that contrasted with dusty gray colorlessness of the place. When she returned from New York to her Virginia farm, she walked in nature and "looked down that early fall day and found leaves on the ground which had that same rusted color." Seeing these autumn leaves as heroic survivors, lying on top of each other or gently touching with their edges curling up toward the light, Aronson was moved to paint them as signs of the fragility of life, and of beauty of amidst destruction. Taking the leaves to her studio, she arranged them into compositions before photographing them, sometimes also cropping the photo image with tape at a later stage.

Aronson started the series with straight-forward depictions of leaves, isolated from their natural context on complementary colored grounds. As time went on she increasingly monumentalized and abstracted their forms, layering different kinds of leaves, with contrasting colors, shapes and textures. The close-up camera views on which the paintings and watercolors of leaves are based allow for microscopic examination of multiple surface variations and tones, while their large scale, rich colors, and dense layering of paint transforms them into dramatic emblems.

As the series continued through 2004, Aronson focused increasingly on formal concerns and the evocation of vitality. In the paintings and watercolors of sea-grape leaves that she collected in Anguilla, the colors radiate tropical beauty, the compositions stress the complex patterns of leaf stems and veins, and the leaves are subjectified by filling the entire pictorial space.

## PORTRAITS

The up-close and personal quality that distinguishes all of Aronson's work is particularly striking in her portraits. As much about relationship as appearance, these portraits of friends, and of the artist, herself, were painted directly from life, in two or three sittings of several hours each, and then finished in the studio. All these people as subjects boldly occupy their pictorial realms. Focusing our attention on their eyes – windows to the soul – Aronson establishes a compelling connection with the individuals she depicts by the use of strong figural silhouettes, intriguing geometry of clothing, and flat backgrounds that force the figures into our space. The three-dimensional modeling of faces contrasts forcefully with two dimensional bodies and non-referential, evocatively- colored backgrounds that provide keys to personality.

Made over an eighteen year period, the portraits included in this exhibition share the declaration of essential individuality, slightly jarring coloration, stylized depiction, and, most significantly, empathy. Comparing the expressionist Roberta (1986), with the red on red Willie (1996), and Jan Aronson's Self-Portrait (2004) reveals her stylistic range and the expressive significance of her color choices. The haunting power of tonal variation and facial close-up, with eyes dead center and head cut off at the canvas' edge, in the Self Portrait, and the formal virtuosity of color and patterning in the paintings of Edgar (1989) and Arthur (1996), give these figures a vibrancy beyond natural appearance. All but Roberta, Edgar and the self portraits are commissioned works in which the artist is aware of the tension implicit in satisfying the patron while maintaining her artist vision. Aronson's self portraits are an open-ended series in which she reconciles the elusive passage of youth and search for acclaim in her career-long commitment to be an accomplished painter. Brutally honest, after making one in 1985 and four at the age of forty, her most recent work reflects a period in which her mother succumbed to cancer and the artist turned fifty-five.

This exhibition represents a selection of paintings and works on paper that show Jan Aronson's art and life from an eighteen year period. Aside from the portraits that she produces intermittently, her works are conceived and executed as discrete series, sequentially. All project her emotional and visceral engagement with art making. Aronson identifies

with her subjects and creates objects that are mediums through which viewers become involved with her vision.

**JAN ARONSON, WINSTON WACHTER FINE ART,  
SEATTLE**

**ANDREW ENGELSON, ARTNEWS, 2004**

Jan Aronson has established a reputation as a nature painter, whether capturing landscapes of the Vermont wilderness or the Caribbean seaside. But a recent series of elegant leaf paintings by the Manhattan-based artist transcended simple notions of nature or still life.

Harvesting fallen leaves from the woods outside her second home, in rural Virginia, Aronson assembles what she finds into ikebana-like compositions. The resulting paintings, all set against stark backgrounds of black or white, serve as near-abstract studies of the burst of color that precedes decay. There's no doubt these are paintings of leaves, but the liquid red washes and yellow swirls are as much about texture, color and pattern as they are about willows and maples.

Some compositions here were formal and static while others-the most effective in this show-were cropped, the leaves seemingly caught in the midst of their fall to earth, as in Leaves #32 (2004).

A sampling of small watercolors was wispiest and not as vital. Similarly, a handful of Aronson's paintings of tropical leaves was much less affecting than the dramatic autumnal pieces, such as Leaves #27 (2003).

These paintings grew out of work Aronson started after witnessing the gray waste of Lower Manhattan shortly after September 11.

Viewed in this light, one can read a kind of valedictory quality into these fiery leaves, an explosion of life before the onset of winter.

***PORTRAITS OF PLACE, THOMAS J. WALSH ART GALLERY***

***FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY, FAIRFIELD CONNECTICUT***

***MARK DANIEL COHEN, ARTNEWS, JANUARY 2000***

The 35 landscape paintings and pastels by Jan Aronson in her "Portraits of Place" exhibition are renditions of sites she has visited throughout the world. Created in rich colors that have been heightened to an intensity beyond that of nature, the landscapes are nevertheless precise representations of such remote locations as the Amazon rain forest, the Baja desert, and the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

Upon close inspection, however, Aronson's renderings appear to be more than just re-creations of such vistas. On the one hand, they are visual records drawn from photographs she has taken during her journeys, and on the other, evocations of how those places made her feel. In the manner of landscape painting by van Gogh, Aronson's portrayals subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, distort the details of the scenery. The contours of trees, mountains, and clouds, for instance, become jagged. They stretch into unnatural forms as if possessed by an other-worldly energy.

Everything Aronson depicts has a quality of motion that is like the gesturing of a human body. The autumn trees in Vermont #4 (1998), for example, seem to reach out onto a dirt path that runs through them. Their branches stretch like tentacles ready to embrace unfortunate passersby. The Big Wood #6 (1995) shows a blanket of snow imbued with an impossible heaviness, holding the ground in its deliberate grip. All Aronson's works are alive with such

attitudes. These portraits of places are clearly also self-portraits, recording the artist's responses to what she has seen.

## **COLLECTOR'S STATEMENT**

**BY: GLENN JANSS**

In the work of Jan Aronson, I find a relevance to the earlier tradition of the American modernists Arthur Dove, Charles Burchfield, Marsden Hartley, or Georgia O'Keeffe. Theirs is a shared search for the essence of a given landscape; the essential, rhythmic energies of nature, her changing moods and elemental forces.

Similarly, these artists are concerned less with an exhaustive rendering of detail than with fresh insights into nature and its primal forces, desiring to connect their personal feelings and interpretations to our own experiences. Their works are unique in their expression of physical reality through the personal, poetic imagery of their paintings.

Nature serves as both a physical and spiritual source for the work of Jan Aronson. Her departure point is that she sees and composes through the lens of her camera, capturing the subtleties that connect her work to earlier traditional painters who also sought to find in contrast of

lightest and darkest values the primary source of visual energy for the composition.

Although nature serves as the source for the images, it is in the painting process itself that Aronson finds her fulfillment as an artist. Her self-admitted masters are the abstract expressionists. For her, expressionism and the formal elements come together in the painting process. Nature serves as her metaphor for the cycles and rhythmic energies of life. In her solitary, people-less landscapes, nature holds the content and provides the suggested forms and textures.

Realism, expressionism and abstractionism unite in Aronson's work, happily precluding her categorization as an artist. This realism, representing a specific place at a specific time, grounds her paintings solidly in objective reality. The viewer experiences the immediacy of the cycles of nature, the times of day, the regenerative forces of nature and the rhythms of the season.

It is in the freedom from the limitations of exacting realistic detail that Aronson is able to express nature's changing moods and her own personal feelings in purely painterly terms. Simultaneous to this element of expressionism is one of abstraction and her desire to reduce the forces, incidents and accidents of nature to their simplest forms; a

desire to penetrate, understand and expose a nature animated by unseen vital forces. It is these elements that encourage the viewer to respond. The depiction of nature is pushed to such a degree of subjective, visionary revelation that a symbolic language of form is born, mimicking the organic forms of nature but becoming a new, personal pictorial dictionary. The artist becomes in this exchange a poet-painter, producing a symbolic, metaphoric correspondence to the actual scene.

Always, within the physical authenticity of the landscape resides this romantic spirit. Out of her own reality springs her ever-present mystic, elusive, mysterious, poetic Self, creating a halfway zone between the illustrative and referential and the abstract and universal. Magic and mystery are evoked, but reality is never denied.

For me, one of the essentials of good painting is the correspondence between the formal elements and the content. Aronson's ability as an artist enables her to achieve that relationship and to adapt her technical execution to her personal revelations. Subtle modulation of tones reveal a universe in constant renewal. One can feel tangible the textures of rocks, bark, mosses and wood and the movements of water and sky.

I have always reveled in the extraordinary sense of fantasy I find in all of Aronson's work. It comes, I believe, from her joy in the visual play of forms, a joy expressed in the twisting, thrusting rhythms, in the dark areas of the paintings that cause the eye and mind to recede deeply into mysterious depths between rocks and behind waterfalls, to then dance over the delicate tracery of foliage. It is in this joyful interplay that Aronson binds together the rhythmic patterns of the forces of nature.

Equally important to me as a collector is her call to share the experience of nature and to participate in her poetic world. This provides a respite from the alienation I find in many contemporary works. I share with the artist her belief that nature and the beauty of the everyday world can still touch us and offer us pleasure, joy and strength, restoring to us a full experience of life and a connection to our world and to one another. Through Aronson's paintings, through her eyes and shared experiences, I reconnect to the world of nature, and my sense of beauty and hope are renewed.

Glenn C. Janss

Collector, American Realist Painters

**PORTRAITS OF PLACE, THOMAS J WALSH ART  
GALLERY, FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY**

**FAIRFIELD CONNECTICUT, 1999**

**DIANA MILLE, PH.D., GALLERY DIRECTOR**

As we approach the next millennium with uncertainty, we find temporary solace in Jan Aronson's spiritual and timeless "Portraits of Place."

While richly detailed and textured from life, Aronson's landscapes are also private, abstract and expressionistic. As a result, they serve as metaphors for the elemental and primal forces beneath the geological surface and deep within the artist's psyche.

I am especially grateful to Ms. Aronson. It has been a unique privilege to work with such a consummate artist and poet who has opened my heart and mind to the sights and sounds of nature.

My deepest thanks are also extended to Chuck DeAngelis for his creative and thoughtful installation and to Lewis and Marilyn Cohen

for their originality and insight in capturing the essence of the artist in their design for the exhibit catalog.

Diana Mille, Ph.D.

Gallery Director

Thomas J. Walsh Art Gallery, Fairfield University

## ***JAN ARONSON AT WINSTON WACHTER, ART IN AMERICA JULY 1999***

### ***GERRIT HENRY***

Jan Aronson has confessed that Abstract Expressionism is a major influence on her landscapes. With some looking, it's easy to see that she is something of an expressionist herself. She has traveled endlessly in search of the sublime – she has hiked in the Himalayas and barged down the Amazon, and she knows well the American Northeast and West. How the human self perceives, pictures and, above all, enlarges upon the drama of nature is what Aronson's work is about.

Expressionism usually leads to stylization, so as to contain – and telegraph – emotion. Aronson's high stylization is exhilarating. She presents the visual facts baldly and boldly, in quick, short strokes and

vital hues. In the largish oil-on-canvas Vermont #4, we are led, smoothly but edgily, up a winding path and into a New England wood, the foliage dark green and black in the foreground and trailing off into wavering, spotty yellows and oranges in the background. The pastel Vermont #3 realizes a leaves-as-tongues-of-flame phenomenon in a single, autumnal tree sketched broadly and thickly in those same yellows and orangey reds, the composition somehow both peaceful and riotous in its limnings of nature's most arboreally festive season.

Along with oils and pastels, Aronson showed graphite drawings that bring a stark, brooding quality to the scenes they picture. Conversely, in an oil snow scene, Big Wood 12, she shines an almost indecorously bright light on a slick, snowy, sunny winter morning.

Questions of style and expression aside, there were moments when Aronson's personal realism became downright visionary, in the modern American tradition of Arthur Dove or Georgia O'Keefe. In oil "skylscapes" like Cloud Triptych #7, clouds and sky twist and undulate, roil and thrust into and about each other with an abandon that can't be called sensual – not without foregoing that abandon's deepest spiritual import, above our earthly estate. It is at moments like these

that Aronson abrogates depiction for vision, outer sense for inner sight. But all of her best moments are worth waiting for.

Gerrit Henry

***JAN ARONSON, WINSTON WACHTER FINE ART,  
1999***

***FONNIE BARRET STRETCH, ARTNEWS, JANUARY  
1999***

In this show of flaming paintings, mostly of autumn in Vermont, Jan Aronson continues her sensuous engagement with nature. It is easy to fall in love with her undulating dirt roads that push into forests swirling with oranges and reds against a host of vibrant greens. And the modest scale of these works accentuates their deeply personal nature.

In Vermont #1, the road, glistening and smooth, flows toward a distant, sunlit glade whose radiant color first recedes and then pulsates toward the surface of the painting, almost turning the perspective inside out. On a larger canvas entitled Toward Born Lakes 1, Aronson creates a richly textured image that is both a closely observed marshy path of moss and leaves and an abstract surface churning with rich brown, yellow, red, and orange pigment. In still another mode, Big Wood #12 is

a winter scene of a frozen river whose silent banks are heaped with snow. Here the wild grass bristles with an intensity that makes the artist's autumn scenes seem cool and calm in contrast. In Aronson's landscapes, rapture and mystery continuously intertwine.

***JAN ARONSON, WINSTON WACHTER, FINE ART, 1997***

***BONNIE BARRET STRETCH, ARTNEWS, JANUARY 1997***

Jan Aronson does for landscape what Janet Fish has done for still life: she infuses timeless subject matter with vitality and a sensuous presence.

These paintings are not merely scenes of forest streams and mountain snowfields in Idaho but abstractions of form, color, light, and movement. Yet they are also deliberately perceived realities. In them, the churning white of racing mountain water cuts sharply through the dark forms of wet rock masses. The stiff lines of fallen trees thrust diagonally across compositions, dividing and uniting them as neatly as the lines of a Mondrian painting. Leaves and mosses undulate in rich pattern of shifting colors.

Nothing is still here. These are no woodland idylls. Instead, all things reach, curl, twist, roll, billow and flow. Rocks are softened by the colors of moss and sky. Water becomes hard and dark from the force of its power. Everywhere, nature's yin and yang mix and play. Even in the frozen snowscape of Boulder Creek #4, the huge sensuous forms of sleeping nature ripple and heave, like sea mammals gliding slowly beneath the vast white comforter of snow. Yet for all this sensation of motion, the special texture of high-mountain winter controls and unites the work.

This was Aronson's second New York show. Whether her energy, technical skills, and love of painting translate into a strong vision is not yet clear. But landscape is a taproot theme for American art. If her painting does not congeal into mere exercises in style, it could, in coming years, help revitalize this theme for the 21st century.

***JAN ARONSON, PORTRAITS OF PLACE, FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY, FAIRFIELD, CT.***

***GEORGE E. JORDAN, N.O.A.R., 1999***

In the fall of 1999, New Orleans-born Jan Aronson exhibited thirty-five landscapes in the Thomas J. Walsh Gallery at the Quick Center for the Arts, Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut (one hour from New York

City where Ms. Aronson has maintained a studio for several years.) Born and raised in New Orleans, Ms. Aronson's first art lessons were the children's classes at the Delgado Museum of Art, now the New Orleans Museum of Art where her work is in the permanent collection.

This exhibition, "Portraits of Place" is a ten year retrospective of oils, watercolors and pastels. Usually a retrospective indicates a body of work from the entire career of an artist's life. It is an overall view of the beginnings, the mature period and the end.

This idea of a ten year retrospective is fascinating in that it offers a concentrated view of the artist's development and personal journey without being anywhere near the end. So many works from one decade present a more detailed picture of what is happening in the artist's career. One begins to see weaknesses disappear and dominant traits emerging to affirm themselves in compositions which perhaps are leading to the artist's mature style. It can be all speculation to the viewer and to the artist yet, to be able to witness this evolution is most certainly an exciting moment!

For example, in this collection of thirty-five works, I felt that the landscapes created between 1989 and 1991 were devoted more

to the image of place. This makes sense, since Ms. Aronson dates her origins as primarily a landscape painter to a 1985 trip to the desert in Israel. Into at least 1991, we witness her discovery and love of painting land, water and sky in remote areas around the world, including the Amazon rain forest, the Baja desert and the Canadian Rockies. But being surrounded by these works from deserts, snow covered mountains and rocky regions, we slowly are made aware of the spirit of place instead of just the image of place.

In the 1998 Cloud Triptych #19, there is not only the pleasure of seeing through the eyes of the artist but there is the privilege of feeling perhaps what the artist experienced while creating it. As one Western collector commented about Aronson's work: "After viewing your landscapes, I stop and look at nature in a totally different way than ever before." This is an element too often lacking in the works of contemporary artists who are overly concerned with subject matter and decoration, especially the young artists who grew up since the Pop Art movement. The Post-Pop realisms -- Hyper and Photo -- have too often created good draftsmen and good copy artists. Those who grew up with Abstract Art of the 1950s seem to have more of an expression and feeling in their art, even when they have moved into the style of Realism. This supernatural feeling is ever present in the later 1990s works by Ms. Aronson.

With some of Ms. Aronson's composition one feels as if she is about to break away from Realism and submerge herself into Abstraction. The artist's work has become an unusual captivating marriage of the two - - Abstraction and Realism -- in that we get the excitement of Abstraction yet Ms. Aronson retains those visual cues of nature to keep us earthly bound. It is a most stimulating experience!

## ***A REVERENCE FOR NATURE FUELS HER PAINTINGS – BY KAREN BOSSICK***

### ***THE WOOD RIVER JOURNAL – KETCHUM 2007***

Jan Aronson paints because she's curious. She's curious about what will happen as she translates reality from the photographs she's taken into works of art. And she's curious to see how she can solve problems and overcome challenges in the very act of painting.

"Someone once asked Vladimir Nabokov why he writes. And he replied, 'So I can find out what happens.' That's the way it is with me. I want to see what happens as I go through the different layers to the finished product," says Aronson.

The journey of finding out what happens has taken Aronson on some wild rides from Himalayan Mountains and Caribbean beaches to her leaf series, which evolved over six years.

Now she's up to her elbows in rock and water portraits in a series called "While Rome Burns," which is currently being shown at Gail Severn Gallery. Aronson will be present at the Opening Reception from 9 to 9 p.m. Friday. And she will discuss her work at 10 a.m. Saturday during the gallery's Artist's Chat.

A realist, formalist and abstract painter all wrapped up in one, Aronson can't remember a time when she wasn't making or looking at art.

"It was something I could do alone, something I could do in a closet. Singing, dancing, making music, by contrast, you have to do in public," says Aronson, who admits she still finds the smell of oil paint and the process of mixing colors "absolutely intoxicating."

She trained as an abstract expressionist at her hometown University of New Orleans and then went to Pratt University in Brooklyn where she got a Master of Fine Art degree.

It was during a 1985 visit to Israel's Negev Desert that she became drawn to landscapes and began painting what she calls her "portraits of place."

"I felt the dryness, the low humidity. I saw the blue sky, the clear air. And I was mesmerized."

Aronson came back to the United States, hiked the Grand Canyon and explored Death Valley, replacing the browns and grays of the rugged landscape with vivid oranges and reds to evoke the heat that she felt while there.

She worked on a series of Sinai paintings for 18 months. And, when it was time to do something different, she headed for the Himalayan Mountains and spent a year and a half painting color-drenched landscapes of those craggy mountains in brushstrokes of purples and blues.

After being on the top of the world, she wanted to see what it was like on the bottom of the world so she, so she headed to Patagonia. And

then she made a beeline to the Amazonian rainforest and Machu Picchu.

“I’ve also gone on at least 50 different hikes in the five mountain ranges surrounding Sun Valley,” says Aronson, who spends summers here with husband Edgar M. Bronfman.

“My work tends to be intense, dramatic. I’m not interested in making a replica of a photograph or scene in nature. Rather, I’m interested in my interpretation, my reaction to the landscape. With the Death Valley portraits, for instance, I was trying to convey the heat of the place because I don’t think I’ve ever been in a place that hot.”

Out of the ashes

Aronson’s leaf series, which has been exhibited at Gail Severn Gallery, had its origins in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Then she painted straightforward depictions of them set against a black background as if there was light coming out.

She called these her “in memoriam” work.

As the leaves aged and faded, it give her a new palette. As time went on, she began focusing on the abstract qualities of the leaves with the help of close-up camera photography. Then she began concentrating on the vitality that she saw in the complex patterns of leaf stems and veins of colorful tropical sea-grape leaves that she collected in Anguilla.

“Abstract interests me more than defining something,” she says.

After six years, Aronson said, “Enough with leaves.” She gathered a number of rocks from a quartz vein that runs through her farm and took them into her studio. And she began photographing and painting ocean waves and ripples in lake water, titling the series, “While Rome Burns.”

“My work is not political—it’s all very personal. But what I’m seeing in this world right now is not very good. We’re really decimating our world. And what am I doing while the world is disintegrating around me? I’m painting.

“Still, I look at my paintings of leaves, rock, water and can’t help but think that maybe one day my paintings may be the only way people can see what was.”

Aronson has paid her dues as an artist, spending nine years in a geodesic dome in the woods of Vermont working every job she could find to make a living while pursuing her passion.

But ask her where she got her first real break and she balks.

“I’m still waiting for it,” she protests, even though she’s had three dozen solo exhibitions in such varied places as Amsterdam and Geneva, New York and Miami, and taught in dozens of programs including Dillard University in New Orleans and Stratton Mountain School in Vermont.

"I'm really proud of my work and I'm curious to see what others' reaction will be. Of course, very few people tell you what they really think. And I don't paint to hear good things, anyway. I paint to the best of my ability."

Still Aronson has received some extraordinary praise over the years.

"I have always reveled in the extraordinary sense of fantasy I find in all of Aronson's work," writes Sun Valley resident Glenn Janss, a collector of American realist painters. "It comes, I believe, from her joy in the visual play of forms, a joy expressed in the twisting thrusting rhythms, in the dark areas of the paintings that cause the eye and mind to recede deeply into mysterious depths between rocks and behind waterfalls, to then dance over the delicate tracery of foliage.

"Equally important to me as a collector is her call to share the experience of nature and to participate in her poetic world. This provides a respite from the alienation I find in many contemporary works."

Despite such praise, painting for Aronson is like doing battle with the canvas—a battle I want to win," she adds.

“Sometimes a painting can get out of control. It’s a strange thing. But it’s almost like there’s a third person in the room with you. For instance, I just finished a 5-by7 painting on Friday. I walked back in on Monday and I couldn’t let go. It wasn’t done. I spent three more hours doing what I thought made it complete.

“Hopefully, when I return home it will say, ‘Finished.’ It gnaws at me when I see something in a piece that doesn’t work. It’s like having the brakes screech—I can’t live with that. I don’t want anything to leave my studio that I haven’t given everything to. When it’s done, it separates from me because I’ve given it everything I have to give.”~