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Canvas sings cityscape's song

Urban life's iconic vistas dot Redding artist's paintings

By Marc Beauchamp

Record Searchlight

Where others might see only commercial clutter — clashing signs for gas stations and fast-food restaurants — Redding artist Barbara Enochian sees graphic patterns, urban wallpaper and irony.

Enochian's portraits of Redding's cityscape include montages of the signs and architecture of the old downtown and the jumble of businesses along Eureka Way, as well as loving renderings of the train trestle that soars

over the Sacramento River.

The trestle, built in 1939, featured prominently in her daily jogs on the Sacramento River Trail.

"Anyone who has passed through the heart of Redding knows how important trains are to our region," she said. "Train tracks bisect the major downtown thoroughfares; train whistles sound during the night."

In the soaring metal girders and concrete abutments she saw poetry.

"Whenever I saw the giant metal girders reaching up to the sky to support the train

Redding.com

To see a gallery of paintings by Barbara Enochian, go to Redding.com.

tracks, I couldn't help but think that our community is blessed to have an outdoor sculpture of such monumental proportions," she said.

The challenge of painting the trestle, she said, was to "portray its familiar lines in a unique way — paring the trestle down to its basic elements and yet still making it recognizable."

A native of the Long Beach area, Enochian moved to Redding in 1979. She had

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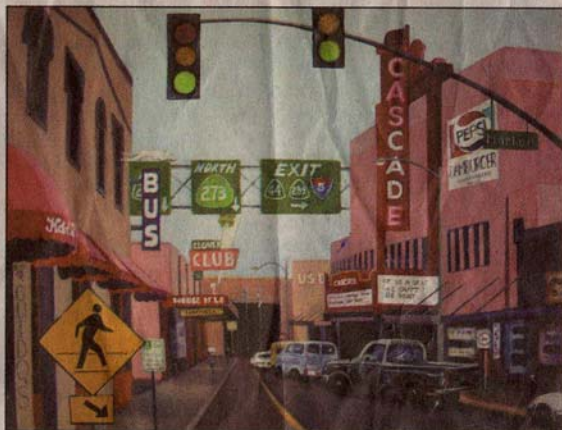


Image courtesy of Barbara Enochian

URBAN WALLPAPER: Redding artist Barbara Enochian often sees beauty or irony in the commercial cityscape. In this painting of the area around Redding's Cascade Theatre, done in the late '90s, she created a montage of downtown signs.

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studied art from the age of 9 and earned a degree in art history from the University of California at Berkeley, but had focused on raising a family with her then-husband, attorney Steve Enochian.

She turned to art to deal with "consuming grief" after her youngest son died of cancer in 1992 at the age of 7. "Thanks to art, I have been making my way from the depths of despair back to the surface," she said.

Regularly driving along Eureka Way in the late '90s,

she recalls, "my eyes would dart from one sign to another. ... I began to appreciate the way they worked together to form a three-dimensional collage." Her interest in numbers, letters and graphics was influenced by the work of Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, she said.

Another influence — New York's Times Square, she said.

"I began to appreciate the signs as design elements in our landscape," she said. "Rather than trying to be harmonious with our natural sur-

roundings, we wallpaper our streets with signs that pop out and totally steal the show."

Her evocative painting of the Cascade Theatre features a montage of iconic downtown signs including the Clover Club, Damburger and the Greyhound bus terminal. "I wanted to mix the old and the new together to show our city's roots and development. I was drawn to the interweaving of graphics with architectural elements, linking words and images together."

To create the paintings, Enochian first took multiple photographs of the signs

along Eureka Way and downtown, then "purposely painted them in awkward proportions so as not to create the impression of reality."

Enochian also uses graphic elements in her more recent abstract collages. "I'm especially partial to words that reflect the human touch, like handwritten letters and postcards, to-do lists and canceled stamps."

E-mail and voicemail are replacing our traditional forms of communication, she noted. "I can't help but feel nostalgic about the loss of the handwritten word."

Enochian studied art at Shasta College with Richard Wilson, John Harper and Susan Schimke. Her work has been featured in exhibitions at the college, Old City Hall and elsewhere.

She teaches art to some 45 adults in a studio beside her home in west Redding. Some have been with her for more than nine years.

"I think creativity is a basic human need, and I feel a joyous high in being able to nurture it in others," she said.

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