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# Style

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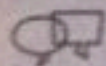
## GALLERIES

### Bernardo Siles at Gallery Plan b

Bolivian architect and painter's hard-edged, cool-colored work seems more Washingtonian than Latin. **C10**



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## Whirlwind tour through the District's many painting exhibits



By Mark Jenkins, Published: February 9, 2012 | [E-mail the writer](#)

Photoshopped collages, video installations, mixed-media assemblages — there's no lack of contemporary media that sidestep traditional artistic techniques. Yet people keep painting. On any given week in Washington, there are too many painting exhibitions to peruse them all. But here's a whirlwind tour, inspired by one show that features a half-dozen area daubers.

"6 Painters," at [Civilian Art Projects](#), doesn't celebrate a trend or advance a thesis. Most of the work is recent, but one canvas, by Tom Green, dates to 1987. There are both representational and abstract works, although few in the latter category represent the "pure" abstraction of mid-20th-century abstract expressionism. That mode is available elsewhere around town.

Green offers two paintings in his customary format, neatly arraying black runic figures that seem to float above bold, single-color backdrops. The show's other two abstractionists are less tidy. Tom Bunnell's paintings, half of them paired with complementary images, feature cell-like forms and a mix of watery and hard-edged shapes. They sometimes suggest nature but in its microscopic form. Champneys Taylor's acrylics, with their pastel colors and horizontal lines, hint at landscape. But the artist interjects



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Eric Finzi mixes pigment with epoxy resin, a fast-drying medium that requires a quick

hand. Yet his images of formally posed women and men (and the occasional tiger) evoke stately art of the past. Cavan Fleming's pictures show the clash of nature and mankind, although the latter is present only in its artifacts: apparently abandoned buildings being reclaimed by the forest, perhaps after a disaster has eliminated their builders.

The largest number of paintings are by Nora Sturges, who's inspired by exotic climes and Italo Calvino's ["Invisible Cities."](#) Painted in oil on fiberboard, the Baltimore artist's pictures are small — sometimes very small — but detailed. One set depicts what seems to be Antarctica, another the travels of a white-haired man in modern garb, identified as Marco Polo. Sturges's style has a medieval quality, but her search for new territory is timeless.

## Willem de Looper

Dutch-born Willem de Looper (1932-2009) arrived in Washington as a young man and worked for many years at the [Phillips Collection](#), one of the wellsprings of the Washington Color School. By the late 1960s, he was employing the techniques pioneered by Morris Louis (who died in 1962), using multiple washes of thin acrylic pigment to produce rich tints and billowing forms. Louis called one of his series "Veils," and "Purple Veil" is among the four large de Looper canvases in [Hemphill Fine Arts'](#) "Paintings 1968-72."

Louis's "Veils" are mostly dark, offering only glimpses of the vivid colors they contain. The work in the de Looper show is brighter and more immediate. All four paintings (originally shown at the Jefferson Place Gallery, another Color School landmark) are keyed to a single hue yet encompass many others. They're all-over paintings, without the areas of blank canvas common in the work of de Looper's predecessors. The effect is fluid and enveloping, with a sense of depth and movement. The ideology of late-'50s "post-painterly abstraction" is fading in these pictures, yielding to a more sensuous outlook.

## Joyce Wellman

There are only six canvases in ["Intuitive Journeys: Works by Joyce Wellman,"](#) and yet it's an expansive show. The pictures are large and the media diverse: oil, acrylic, watercolor, drawing and collage. While Wellman's style is abstract, and such titles as "Evening Sky" and "Sun Burst" refer simply to qualities of light and color, her art is dense with references.



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The New York-bred Wellman, who has lived and worked in the District for more than three decades, trained as a printmaker, but she’s adept at layering thick, heavily worked pigment. Even the simplest of these pieces, the pale yellow “South American Journey,” is elaborately textured. The largest, “Number Genome,” goes further, incorporating numerals as well as collaged newspaper clippings and playing cards that evoke African American history. It’s not a genome, exactly, but the painting does suggest the heritage underlying Wellman’s work.

## Bernardo Siles

Architect and painter Bernardo Siles is originally from Bolivia, but the hard-edged, cool-colored work he’s showing at [Gallery Plan b](#) seems more Washingtonian than Latin. That’s especially true of his most arresting pictures, which leave areas of the canvas white, suggesting the compositions of Morris Louis and Color School colleague Kenneth Noland.

Unlike those precursors, Siles works in oil, not acrylic, and doesn’t let the pigments flow. He crafts oblique patterns of near-parallel color bands, mostly in blue, green and gray. The colors sometimes appear to overlap, melding into a different hue at the intersection. These minimalist paintings, identified simply by number, don’t have a lot of energy. But they are calm and cooling, like a trickle of water through a moss garden.

## Caroline Adams

Pennsylvania-bred landscape painter Caroline Adams depicts both the Mid-Atlantic states and Ecuador, where she lives. The South American country offers more dramatic views, with deeper valleys and higher mountains. But Adams isn’t particularly interested in drama, as the title of her show at [Susan Calloway Fine Arts](#) indicates. “Time of Day” uses muted colors and soft forms to conjure such ever-changing natural phenomena as clouds, storms and light.

Adams has a degree in printmaking, which may explain why she paints multiple views of similar vistas, sometimes dividing them into diptychs or triptychs. The show’s 14 small “Variations,” executed on panels with egg tempera and oil, are hung together in clumps, as if to offer simultaneous views of the same (or almost the same) scenery. It’s an idea that probably wouldn’t have occurred to a painter before the advent of photography, but Adams’s execution of it feels more classical than modern.

*Jenkins is a freelance writer.*

## 6 Painters

*on view through Feb. 25 at Civilian Art Projects, 1019 Seventh St. NW; 202-607-3804; [www.civilianartprojects.com](http://www.civilianartprojects.com).*

## Willem de Looper: Paintings 1968-72

*on view through March 10 at Hemphill Fine Arts, 1515 14th St. NW; 202-234-5601, [www.hemphillfinearts.com](http://www.hemphillfinearts.com).*