



VICTORY OVER BELIEF: By Michael Collins.

Collins melds a sinister mix of wet-looking, thickly brushed Jumanji-like jungles with the soaring columns and domes of classical architecture. His rampant expressionism is laden with ghostly figures and skulls barely hidden in the muck of juicy reds, yellows, and blacks, as in *Arc* and *Victory Over Belief*. These menacing apparitions appear responsible for the erosion of the architectural spaces that apparently once imbued a hallowed sense of purity, proportion and order.

These are apocalyptic paintings, evoking a world burning with decadence, and yet they are oddly seductive, with shiny, lush paint and frenetic, sinuous lines. Only occasionally does Collins' passionate mix of opposites verge on the histrionic, as with his imagery of a dead flamingo and writhing, howling skeletons.

Sacred and Profane Spaces: Paintings and Works on Paper by Michael Collins, Virginia Miller Gallery, 169 Madeira Ave., Coral Gables; (305) 444-4493. Through Jan. 31. Hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Saturday.

A Sense of Place

From Iceland-cool to jungle-hot, color and light communicate

By ELISA TURNER
Special to The Herald

A profound simplicity pervades the paintings of Louisa Matthiasdottir. Carved into bold blocks of color, her landscapes, still lifes and family portraits glow quietly with the crystalline clarity of the piercing northern light found in her native Iceland.

She has maintained this resolute vision of form, color and sense of place throughout her career, which is sensitively illustrated in *Louisa Matthiasdottir: Paintings, 1930s-1990s* at the Kendall Campus Art Gallery of Miami-Dade Community College.

Jewel tones of blue, green and purple are common in her work, but they lack the glittering flash of faceted stones. Instead, Matthiasdottir's compelling way with color brings to mind the subtle polish of cabochon jewels, rounded stones that absorb, rather than reflect, light.

Born in Reykjavik in 1917, Matthiasdottir moved to New York in 1941. There she studied with influential German-born abstract painter Hans Hofmann, known for thickly painted and overlapping geometric forms, which spurred the development of Abstract Expressionism. Matthiasdottir took in the lessons of those big, brushy forms, but never completely embraced abstraction. In 1944, she married American figurative painter Leland Bell. They made their home in New York City where she lives today, now a widow.

"I like painting in America," she has said. "But I understand the Icelandic landscape much better. It's not that it is any more beautiful. But it's my landscape. . . I'm born into it."

A particularly beautiful landscape is *Five Sheep*, with wide, undulating green plains in the foreground that contrast with sloping, flat-topped purple mountains in the distance. Horizontal slashes of sapphire skies and lakes demonstrate her handsome sense of color. A handful of creamy white sheep, blocky shapes that boldly delineate the turn of a head, punctuate these nearly abstract, horizontal rhythms. It's a joyous, firmly resolved painting.

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH EGGPLANT: By Louisa Matthiasdottir.

ART REVIEWS

That sense of vision, balancing vigorous color and form, is most evident in the landscapes, though the more successful still lifes, such as an untitled one from 1995, also show Matthiasdottir at her best. Sharp streaks of dark blue suggest shadows on a pale blue cloth, on which stand a red pepper, a sliced green fruit and a purple jelly jar. It's a vivid composition, giving this modest domestic setting the same lucid weight that she gives her beloved Icelandic vistas.

Louisa Matthiasdottir: Paintings, 1930s-1990s, Kendall Campus Art Gallery, Miami-Dade Community College, 11011 SW 104th St., (305) 237-2377. Through Jan. 26. Hours: 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday, Thursday, Friday; noon-7:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday.

'Sacred and Profane Spaces'

Just as Louisa Matthiasdottir looks to cool, northern light, so painter Michael Collins of Houston finds his inspiration in steamy, southern scenes of riotous, entangled vegetation. His paintings and works on paper are on exhibit in *Sacred and Profane Spaces* at Virginia Miller Gallery.



GALLERIES



AT THE GALLERIES

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Information must be received by Monday of the week in which the item is to be printed. Please include your name and a daytime phone number.