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PAINTER SHEDS LIGHT ON ARTISTIC ORIGINS IN COLOR-FILLED 'CREATION'

By Cate McQuaid
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PROVINCETOWN -- Sitting in the small back room of the Berta Walker Gallery surrounded by Paul Resika's "Creation Series" is akin to sitting alone on a deserted beach on a sunny day. It's a private experience. The intensity of light -- at the beach, it reflects off water and sand; in the gallery, it's in the pure vivid colors that Resika revels in -- bores into you and buoys you. I was reminded of an Emily Dickinson poem with the line "Inebriate of air am I, / And debauchee of dew." Just sitting amid these paintings is quietly and deeply exhilarating.

Resika, who just turned 78, has been painting for decades. He came of age with the abstract expressionists; he came to Provincetown at 19 and studied with Hans Hofmann. He has had an illustrious career, which comes down to this: The essence of color is light. The forms -- nudes, boats, landscapes -- that structure his paintings are mere vessels for tone. He has many works at Berta Walker, but the glory of the show is "Creation Series," a collection of four large canvases, each of which nearly fills a wall of the back room.

They are primary colors: Two blue, one red, one yellow. The rhythm of the installation -- blue, red, blue, yellow -- sets up a pulse of depth and surface, receptivity and assertiveness. Fish fly over each canvas in arcs; circles and triangles hover. They act as markers, a guide for the eye to keep it from drowning. The elemental shapes, even the fish, refer to human and creative origins; they could be the tools of generation. And they, too, play a role in how the color blinks into the viewer's eyes: orange fish skid against blue backgrounds; blue fish flash against red. There's a give and take here, a little of the masculine in the feminine and vice versa.

The four paintings are meant to be seen this way, in this intimate, chapel-like context. They may or may not be sold as a group and shown this way again. In typical P-town style, the exhibit has an abbreviated run -- it closes Sunday. If you're in Provincetown this weekend, the Berta Walker Gallery is the only place you'll find the sun indoors, in the guise of Resika's "Creation" paintings.

Also at Berta Walker is a peculiarly satisfying collaboration between Resika and Varujan Boghosian, a contemporary of the painter's. Boghosian has always been more of a sculptor and collage artist; his work is about the Dada of strange juxtapositions. What could he and colorist Resika possibly have in common? In their collaborative collages and assemblages, each artist is just himself; piquant and fun tensions arise in their collision of styles.

You get the lusciousness of Resika's tones and loose brushwork (or pastel application) in small doses; Boghosian interrupts and punctuates the reverie with crisp additions. In "Blue Moon, for Blair," we have Resika's violet sky over a turquoise sea; Boghosian has sliced the paper and slipped in a moon (practical eggshell brown, not blue) and a small ship, chugging through the dreamy waves. In these works, the artists spar affectionately and come up with small but delightfully improbable works of art.