

## Internationally acclaimed artist brings innovative style to Richmond



JO LORD, Special correspondent May 8, 2011



Leslie Wayne creates her color-saturated, dimensional oil paintings without the use of brushes.  
TAYLOR DABNEY

Close your eyes and picture an artist painting a landscape. You might see someone quietly seated in a sun-dappled meadow, brush in hand, serenely contemplating the beauty of nature.

Leslie Wayne is not that artist.

For her, landscape painting is a physical process. She pushes, she pulls, she slices, she scrapes and she scores the paint, all without benefit of a brush.

The result — a dynamic collection of color saturated, dimensional oil paintings — is on view at the Visual Arts Center of Richmond.

"Leslie Wayne is a significant contemporary artist, and we're honored to bring this important survey of her work to Richmond," said Caroline Wright, the center's director of exhibition programming. "She uses an innovative process and a massive amount of oil paint to expand both the possibilities of her medium and our understanding of what a painting can be."

Like her paintings, Wayne's inspirations are layered. She's responding to her personal history and the history of art in her work. She's also responding to the history of the Earth by visually referencing its sedimentary layers and shifting tectonic plates.

"She applies and manipulates paint with the sensibility of a geologist," Wright said. "She observes how time and physical forces can transform liquid paint into dimensional, sculptural forms."

Other contemporary artists — Thomas Nozkowski, Martin Puryear, Lynda Benglis and Charles Burchfield included — provide additional inspiration.

"Elizabeth Murray is also hugely influential," Wayne said. "She released me from the tyranny of the rectangle."

As a young artist, Wayne gravitated toward landscape and oil painting in their traditional styles. She studied painting at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and sculpture at the Parsons School of Design in New York City.

The move to New York in the early 1980s set her on a course that led to her break with strictly observational painting. In the past, "I knew what I wanted the paintings to look like before I even started painting them," Wayne said. "There was no challenge in the process itself. Eventually, I gave myself permission to fail and I really began experimenting."

In time, she developed the intuitive, abstract style that has become her signature.

As a "process painter," Wayne doesn't set out to create a work about a particular subject. Instead, she lets the material lead the way.

What's not immediately apparent is that she doesn't sculpt her forms first and paint them later. Instead, the color and form are one.

"The paint is the color, which is the form, which I manipulate all at once," she said.

Wayne achieves her effect using a retractable blade and spackling trowels ranging from 6 to 24 inches wide. Using the trowels, she drags thin layers of paint, building one on top of another, allowing each to dry.

She then manipulates the material — the top layer of color having dried while the layers beneath are still malleable — and cuts into the surface with the blade, pushing the paint with the trowel and manipulating it into its ultimate three-dimensional form.

The result is work that evokes a strong response in its viewers.

"I want people to be viscerally moved when they look at my work. The intellectual stuff can come afterwards," Wayne said. "I think the work is really successful if it makes the hair on the back of your neck stand up."

### "Leslie Wayne: Recent Work"

**Where:** Visual Arts Center of Richmond, 1812 W. Main St.

**When:** Through June 4

**Hours:** Weekdays from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m.

**Admission:** Free

**Tours and events:** (1) Free, guided tours for children and adults available on request. (2) Gallery guides for students and a hands-on interactive station at gallery entrance. (3) "Side by Side Saturdays": Make and take a small panel painting based on Leslie Wayne's work May 14 at 10 a.m. (For children 5 to 15 accompanied by an adult.)

**Information:** (804) 353-0094 or [www.visarts.org/exhibitions](http://www.visarts.org/exhibitions)



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## Richmond Times-Dispatch

Richmond.com  
300 E. Franklin St.  
Richmond, VA 23219  
Phone: 804-649-6000  
Email: [content@richmond.com](mailto:content@richmond.com)

