

# KansasCity★

PREVIEW/ART

Friday, November 3, 2000 THE KANSAS CITY STAR

## Room to soar among spacious skies

**Lisa Grossman's 'In the Open' affirms relevance of simple landscape paintings**

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Special to The Star

Whether tranquil and ethereal blue, filled with luminous golden sunshine, or threateningly gray and getting darker, the skies are the main attraction in painter Lisa Grossman's current exhibit of new landscape paintings, "In the Open," at Dolphin.

Mounted in thick black frames and tightly packed into the Dolphin's main gallery space, Grossman's accomplished oil paintings on canvas reflect her ongoing fascination with the expansive prairies, grasslands and Flint Hills of Kansas, and even more so with the huge skies above them.

As we enter the 21st century, firmly planted in a media-saturated, technologically driven culture where it is almost as common for contemporary artists to incorporate Web sites or LED boards or DNA samples as it is to use oil paint, we might ask whether landscape paintings are still relevant.

When there are so many social, political and conceptual issues to address, do images of vast skies and distant horizons have anything meaningful to say?

To judge from the sales of Grossman's new body of work, the answer is "yes." In this, her second solo show at Dolphin, about 20 paintings sold prior to the opening, and, of the 34 on view, most have the red dots of a done deal affixed to their labels. This may be exactly because of the factors noted above. In the wake of the new, the manufactured, the faster and faster, landscapes offer the comfort of a familiar, immediately comprehensible reference and remind us of the miraculous natural beauty we increasingly overlook as we drive by at 70 miles per hour.

There is indeed a certain nostalgic quality to envisioning Grossman painting, as she does, "en plein air."



"Sky Light" (1999, above) and "The Color at Dusk" (1999) are part of Lisa Grossman's exhibit of new landscape paintings at Dolphin.



Working, as she explains, "in a very direct and often urgent manner, drawing energy from my surroundings and translating it in paint." Some of the most appealing works on view are small "sketches" that often read almost as pure abstractions, composed of energetic, expressionistic brush strokes above even, horizontal swipes of color. Here Grossman is especially loose and confident and most apt to capture what seems like pure essence.

A sense of timeless essence is furthered by the fact that Grossman leaves out any evidence of human presence. Telephone wires and architectural structures are overlooked in her desire to focus exclusively on the natural landscape. Often the results

are dramatic, as in "The Color at Dusk," where an intensely orange slice of sunlight radiates along a distant horizon, competing for prominence with emphatic blue clouds that seem to be closing in as evening approaches. A thin, straight band of deep green at the bottom provides a spare earthly context.

Grossman's use of a reddish-orange underpainting, which reveals itself through thin passages of paint, lends an underlying warmth to the works displayed, all but two of which were created this year. Among them, her "Yellow Twilight" almost glows, capturing a magical sense of peace and satisfaction at the completion of the day.

While a similarity of compositional

### REVIEW

■ "Lisa Grossman: In the Open — New Landscape Paintings" and "Johnny Naugahyde" (see review below) continue at Dolphin, 1901 Baltimore, through Nov. 11. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays. Call (816) 842-5877 for information.

structure among many of the paintings tends to make the show feel somewhat repetitive, a variety in size, the inclusion of vertical elements (trees, shrubs, etc.) rendered in gestural brush strokes and Grossman's ability to create tension through color relationships all help to sustain interest. The best paintings satisfy on a number of levels — readable not only as elegant Kansas landscapes but also as fluid abstractions, compelling in their own right.