Jarring Masons'

Alden Mason's new paintings come to Boise
By S. Duda

Alden Mason: New Work, on display at the Boise Art Museum, Sept. 1 through Oct. 23.

Alden Mason is a contemporary painter working images he dreamed from the Stone Age. The recent paintings, from 1989 to present, featured in the Boise Art Museum's exhibit, Alden Mason: New Work, highlight this 75-year-old's singular talent for conjuring fields of color and line thoroughly modern, yet strangely ancient and entrancing.

Mason is an artist full of youthful, brilliant and engaging contradictions. His work is charged with humor and unease, truth and myth, nature and mystery. The Washington state painter's recent canvases are hectic, buzzing images that dance and float as if possessed with a timeless spirit magic lifted from ancient petroglyphs, ritual guides and hidden cultures.


Alden Mason's, Pink Vase, 1994.

These paintings hum with a primitive, tribal nature. On numerous bird-watcher trips to exotic locales, Mason has been influenced by local cultures and indigenous art and peoples. These experiences have inspired Mason's work with the all-powerful, shapeshifter spirituality apparent in the final stage of development (1977-90). Here, Mason illustrates his own special childhood anxiety at being the only, and at home in a house full of hootery. A forest becomes red, green, orange and blue; streaks; the grey, colorful, serene, giving it a sense urgency that jumps with the odd gestures of the bird watcher and the frantic, ill energy of one of Mason's signature 'spirit birds.' It takes the eye a lot of spy, dog homestays in the piece, the feeling, scent of tension lingering close to the surface.

Mason's still lifes are flat, yet sensed. The thin acrylic paints Mason applies with vigorous brush strokes and squiggles bring a dynamic movement and electricity to the work. The paintings look like it's still flowing, running, and combine into a waving, liquid dream.

In the qualk, grapevine still life, The Pink Vase (1994), M's Macon pieces the scene with huge, vivid color squiggles. From far away, the piece floats, from close up, it is a mesmerizing wall of blues, pink and turquoise. For over 40 years, Alden Mason has been challenging the art world with his thoughtful and unique combinations of color and line. In New Work we see Mason, a constantly evolving and growing artist, at his best and very best. He is a painter independent, wholly original, constantly reaching new heights and pushing new ideas.