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## Just call it 'Pre-modern'

### Peter Wayne Lewis says his art goes back to beginning of time

By Marcus Crowder - [mcrowder@sacbee.com](mailto:mcrowder@sacbee.com)

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What happens when you combine African cave paintings, theoretical physics and Thelonious Monk?

You get a Peter Wayne Lewis painting.

His paintings are both primal and esoteric, with an unusual but definitive rhythm.

Lewis, who was born in Kingston, Jamaica, raised in Sacramento and who now lives in New Jersey and Beijing, shows his dynamic abstract paintings around the world. Museums and galleries that have shown Lewis' work include the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C.; Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art in Sapporo, Japan; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Yassine Art Center of Dakar, Senegal.

His latest works are being presented in a rare collaboration between two Sacramento galleries, JayJay Gallery, 5520 Elvas Ave.; and 40 Acres Art Gallery, 35th Street and Broadway.

At JayJay, Lewis displays works completed between 2006 and 2008 called "Grand: The Booster Paintings." The show opened Jan. 9 and stays up until Feb. 23. At 40 Acres, Lewis' "Strings Genesis" paintings produced from 2001 to 2006 are in the gallery until March 29.

Though Lewis' work isn't representational – showing us objects, people, or images we can identify – it is about something.

"The language that's in my paintings is rooted in a tradition that goes back 35,000 years to the origins of human beings," Lewis says by telephone from the East Coast.

"I'm interested in the language of pictograms and hieroglyphics," the artist says. He's also interested in physics and visually transforming conceptual conceits into images. Add in Lewis' love of music from Beethoven and Strindberg to Coltrane and Ellington, and you have a portrait of the artist as an erudite cauldron of all culture.

Lewis' family came to Sacramento in 1962 when he was a child. They lived first in Del Paso Heights before moving to Land Park. Lewis attended Kennedy High School before going to San Jose State, where he received his master of arts degree in painting. His fondest memories of Sacramento include hanging out with his father, a jazz pianist, and going with him to various gigs around the city. Naturally the unique harmonics and sultry dissonance of a composer like Monk still fascinate Lewis.

The expansiveness of Lewis' upbringing typically informs his work. The paintings don't superficially conform to notions of artists from the African diaspora only making work with social concerns or dealing with identity politics. Lewis will have none of that kind of reductive, restrictive thinking.

"Human beings created this technology of painting to try to understand or navigate through the world that we exist in," Lewis says.

"Every painting is an abstraction of what life actually is."

JayJay co-owner Beth Jones feels Lewis' paintings have a strong intuitive component.

"They're very spontaneous in a way but at the same time made by a person with a lot of skill and intelligence," Jones says.

She first worked with Lewis in 1989 while at the downtown Jennifer Pauls Gallery. Jones and JayJay partner Lynda Jolley had the idea of showing Lewis concurrently with 40 Acres Gallery and partnering with director Kim Curry.

"We thought it would be a great way to re-introduce Peter to Sacramento because he'd be in two venues at the same time."

And the two venues with different followings could use each other's resources to reach more people than they could individually.

"We have lots of people who come out to see us, who we sell work to, and 40 Acres has a whole other client base they work with," Jones says.

"Just the idea that Kevin Johnson had the vision to have a visual art component to his nonprofit is amazing. We want to support that, and this was a way we could."

The business end of it made sense and the personal connections allowed the partnership to flourish.

"It was not only a great opportunity to show Peter but also a great opportunity to work with Kim, who we really admire," Jones says.

Curry is the director of visual arts for St. HOPE Academy and director of its 40 Acres Art Gallery, which celebrated its fourth anniversary on Monday.

"The mission of the 40 Acres Gallery is to showcase art of interest to this community here," Curry says.

"So for me it's about showing museum-quality art by primarily artists of color."

Presenting Lewis' "Strings Genesis" series gives Curry an opportunity to do something she hasn't done at the gallery before – show nonrepresentational art work.

"I knew 40 Acres had to get itself established first as a place to come and see great art," Curry says.

"Then we could have that discussion about abstraction and more so – abstraction by artists of color."

So bringing in the paintings of Lewis makes a natural fit.

"He's an artist who has definitely established himself not only in this country but worldwide in terms of what he's doing and the caliber and quality of his work," Curry says.



Lewis says these paintings, such as "Strings F" on display at 40 Acres Art Gallery, were inspired by "science and especially theoretical physics. There are some fantastic ideas about the cosmos, life and matter."

[www.jayjayart.com](http://www.jayjayart.com)



Former Sacramento artist Peter Wayne Lewis, who now lives in New Jersey and Beijing, is represented by simultaneous exhibits at the local 40 Acres and JayJay galleries.

<http://www.jayjayart.com/>

40 Acres will host several programs around the "Strings Genesis" exhibit to help people grasp what Lewis' work entails. Those programs include a Sunday afternoon conversation with the artist and a panel discussion on abstraction next month.

Lewis says there are a number of things going on when he paints.

"I am not painting particular things, but I am inspired by science and especially theoretical physics. There are some fantastic ideas about the cosmos, life and matter."

For these paintings, he specifically thought about scientific concepts of order, chaos, gravity, speed, time and light. Lewis meshed these concepts with the simple defining structure of a grid that informs much of modern design.

"In my paintings there is lyrical echo of this grid pattern, but I would say this is pre-modern, not post-modern. It goes back to the beginning of all human beings and our desire to create pictures of the world in order to understand it."

## Peter Wayne Lewis

**WHAT:** "Strings Genesis"

**WHEN:** Second Saturday reception, 5-8 p.m. Saturday; regular hours noon-6 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Saturday, through March 29

**WHERE:** 40 Acres Art Gallery, 3428 Third Ave.

**INFORMATION:** (916) 456-5080

**WHAT:** "Grand: The Booster Paintings"

**WHEN:** 11 a.m. -4 p.m. Wednesday- Saturday, through Feb. 23

**WHERE:** JayJay Gallery, 5520 Elvas Ave.

**INFORMATION:** (916) 453-2999

### About the writer:

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