

# “Sid Garrison: Backstory,” Kiosk Gallery

by John C. Tibbetts / September 27, 2018 / KC Studio

Sid Garrison normally avoids generic labels for his images. But when one recent viewer described them as “Colored-Pencil Paintings,” Garrison accepted the description. Even though the word “painting” for most of us usually denotes brushes and the application of pigments, Garrison’s use of pencils is perfectly appropriate. He uses them to apply their hues to his Strathmore papers in an intricate series of cross-hatchings that, after days, even weeks of intensive labor, effectively eliminate all traces of the hand of the artist. Their sprawling shapes, vibrant colors, and stippled patterns attract the eye with their spontaneity and lack of premeditation.

“The important thing for me is to start,” Garrison says, “— and not wait for inspiration.” We believe him when he adds, “Curiosity and risk are what makes [them] engaging.” Do they “give something back” to us, as he suggests? Yes, see if they don’t invite you to advance and retreat before them, in a sort of dance — to take the long view of their flat color fields, and, at the same time, move closer to inspect their active and granular patternings.

Stand at a remove. Dive in for the nearer revelations.

Seven images occupy the exhibition space of the Kiosk Gallery, presently located in the Livestock Exchange Building in the West Bottoms. Thanks to gallery owner Eric Dodson, who selected and arranged the works on display, The Kiosk Gallery is now in its 52<sup>nd</sup> show since its inception in 2012.

The title of the present show, “Backstory” is perfectly appropriate. There is something deeply personal here, testifying to Garrison’s evolution as an artist, as well as the physical exertions necessary to produce these works. For example, the large size of these images, 28 inches square, belong to the years before 2012, when numerous health problems had yet to affect his back and his heart. Indeed, Garrison’s relocation from San Francisco to Kansas City several years ago had a lot to do with his health. Now, several medical procedures behind him, he says he is turning to smaller works. Don’t think for a minute that every painter doesn’t invest a measure of his or her health for the sake of their art. Emil Zola once wrote that paintings are veritable *secretions* of the hand and the perceptions. And each of Garrison’s images is a testament to weeks of back-breaking, intensive application.

Consider, for example, Images like "September 25, 2009," which greet the visitor at the entrance, and others, such as "January 26, 2008" and "December 31, 2009." They convey the "backstory" of Garrison's close and complete absorption in the process at hand; and they likewise challenge the viewer to participate on these terms. These are abstractions that deny representation and narrative altogether in favor of the play of moods and ideas. Perhaps, because they are on paper, as opposed to canvas or wood, they share with us a more genial intimacy. Suggestive of the patterns of the modernist Manny Farber, they playfully juxtapose sharply edged color fields of radiant crimsons and greens with areas of minute, termite-like squibs and scrawls. The bluntness of the former is countered by the frivolity of the latter. . .

It is a most serene experience, albeit a rather sly, engagement — on paper and with the viewer.