

MERRITT

From page 1

She's painted on cardboard, rice paper and tape to make her work more textured.

In her current work she's started drawing straight, horizontal lines in graphite across the width of each painting.

"It's a grid, well, not exactly a grid, but lines that go on top of the painting," she says. "In a sense I feel they're pulling together the chaos behind it. The paint is very abstract. I like to use the lines to make order out of the chaos behind it."

She just stumbled upon doing that, she says, then realized that Agnes Martin and Louise Bourgeois, whom she names as influences, used grids in their paintings.

"So it's really nothing new," she says, though agrees that in her work it's "a different concept, a different approach. I didn't set out to do them," she says.

"I do play around with surface texture. I collage a lot of things, hide things underneath the paint."

The horizontal lines also suggest written paper, especially in "Blue: Untitled," where the lines are just the right thickness and distance from each other to echo those on composition paper.

When that's suggested to Merritt, she says, "I incorporated text into some of my other paintings. It's definitely not far-fetched...Maybe these are lines that need to be filled. I'll have to think about this."

Merritt grew up in a creative family: her dad is a furniture designer and her mom is "a closet writer." Merritt would go into work with her dad sometimes and he'd seat her at his drafting board.

"His designs are very technical," she says. "His work is very detail-oriented." Her mother's work, on the other hand, "is very emotional and from the heart, very



COURTESY PHOTO

Merritt

expressive.

"Growing up in a creative household has its moments," she adds. "My mother always says, 'Get a real job.' My dad goes, 'Sometimes the road will take you in another way.'"

Merritt drew as a kid, but didn't purchase her first set of paints until she was 20. She had met a Brazilian painter in the Carolinas who told her, "You need to paint."

She started painting on her own, then took art classes at Edison College and Florida Gulf Coast University. In 1997 at Edison, she received an Emerging Artist Award for a drawing.

"I had artists I would meet who would say, 'Don't go to art school. Just stay in your studio and paint. That's the school,'" she recalls.

She's been affiliated with Space39 since they opened.

"I like Space39. They have a great eye for art," she says. "They have a good space, and they have an eye for choosing the artists. I am very honored to be a part of that."

In addition to Space39, Merritt's had work exhibited at the von Liebig Art Center in Naples and at the Arts for ACT gallery in downtown Fort Myers.

She's received good feedback on her new series she says.

"I'm still working on paintings in the series," she says, "experimenting with some rice paper, doing paintings on that paper. I have a lot of ideas running around in me. It's really in the baby stages -- these are the first paintings in the series. I'm just getting into it. I'm just starting to have an idea of what it might be."

Merritt works a day job, painting during the other hours in a studio in her home. Though she has a 9 to 5 job to pay the rent and put food on the table, "I consider myself a full-time painter," she says. "I just want to paint."

"I paint because I have to paint -- that's what I am." ■

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— said Merritt

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