



El Camino College Art Gallery

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Torrance, California 90506

Phone: (310) 660-3010

Gallery Hours:
Mon & Tues 9-4
Wed & Thurs 12-8
Closed Fridays & weekends

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www.elcamino.edu/commadv/ArtGallery





EARTH AND SKY

A retrospective survey of paintings, drawings,
and digital works by



CARSON GLADSON



<http://www.elcamino.edu/commadv/artgallery/index.html>

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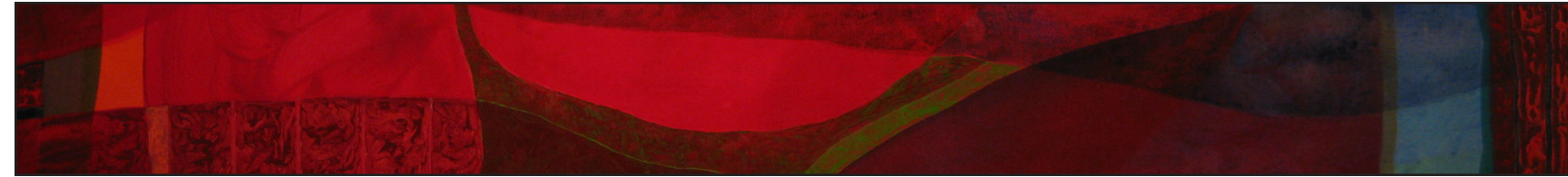
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ABOUT CARSON GLADSON



Carson, 1962

El Camino College Art Gallery is proud to present *Earth and Sky*, a retrospective survey of painting, drawing and digital work by Carson Gladson. This exhibition was organized in tandem with a solo exhibit of his work, titled, *Carson Gladson, Musical Landscape Improvisations*, 2011, at Chapman University in Orange, California.

Carson Gladson was born in 1940 in Lexington, Kentucky to Mary Mitchell and her husband, theology graduate student, Dallas Gladson. By the age of two the family had moved to Chino, California where Dallas had been posted to his first ministry as the chaplain at the state prison there. Several years later the family moved to San Quentin where Dallas served as the chief chaplain for the California prison system. While living on San Quentin Island, a prisoner friend of the Gladson family gave Carson his first art making instruments, a set of paints.

By age fourteen Carson had experimented sufficiently with the paints in his box. Feeling he had results good enough to show, he rode his bicycle to the Oakland Museum of Art with one of his first paintings, a still life with apples, and asked to see the museum director. Amazingly, she not only was willing to see him but also kindly invited him into her office, offered him a critique of the work and a career was launched.

Gladson matriculated at Chapman College (now Chapman University) the alma mater of his parents, with

the intention of majoring in music composition. He arrived on campus several days before classes commenced and made his way to the art department with his art portfolio in hand. He was promptly told by the head of the department he had the makings of being the finest artist the school had ever produced – so ended his career in music composition. After studying at Chapman, the University of California, Berkeley, UCLA and California State University at Fullerton, he began his teaching career - initially at California State University, Northridge, and then for almost 40 years at El Camino College, in Torrance, California.

Today Carson Gladson enjoys an international reputation as a landscape painter although initially he pursued abstract paintings that featured subtle color and extensive use of bio-morphic shapes. At nineteen he had his first one-man show at the Long Beach Museum of Art that drew a rave review in the Los Angeles Times by art critic William Wilson and so impressed the museum director that he bought a work for his personal collection.

Over the years Gladson's work has evolved from his early foray into abstraction to unabashed celebrations of west coast landscapes. An avid photographer as well as painter, Gladson has been inspired by the beauty and serenity of the outdoors and has used many of his photographs as jumping off points for his paintings. Over time his primary medium became pastel that worked exquisitely with his impressionistic approach to art. During

the 1970's and 1980's the majority of his output were large-scale drawings that featured the transcendent use of color, light and could be characterized as ethereal works. Many of these drawings were of specific locations in Southern California, Oregon, Washington and Vancouver, BC while many others are mythic creations from the artist's mind. He has been referred to as a California plein air artist and there are clearly correlations, but his work is too contemporary for that to be an accurate characterization.

Making massive detailed pastel drawings for both corporate and personal collections eventually took a physical toll on the artist. In the late 1980's he had literally exhausted the muscles in his right shoulder and found he could no longer continue work in this manner. At the same time his desire for experimentation pushed him forward towards a new medium – the computer.

Gladson took a sabbatical from El Camino College, bought a computer and taught himself to use it by reading the manual. Through trial and error he mastered the machine and began to explore. While oversized pastel drawings had to be shelved, Gladson was able to work with acrylics and produced several series of color washed works. He then began to combine imagery from his photography, along with elements from Photoshop to create a unique body of works that he titled *Flower Music*. For over a year he experimented with these works on paper, eventually printing them on a large-scale printer.



The imagery of these works is often placed, brilliantly, in opposition—for instance, transparent fields of color and abstract elements of landscape are overlaid with hard-edged rendition of flowers. Throughout these works, the importance of the use of unusual methods is crucial to understanding the depth and breadth of his oeuvre, especially in understanding his persistent manipulation of subtle light and its effect on color. Some of these works could be considered tone paintings with no strong contrasts, while others are the exact opposite.

Over time, Carson Gladson immigrated back to simpler acrylic paintings to which he would add a light pastel overlay and occasionally embed photographic images. He was particularly successful with these canvases and that led him to a new working style that he titled transparent collage. As Gladson has said, I've taken subjects I find most compelling: the figure, the landscape the detailed subject and abstract symbolic forms, and combined them; not just side by side as in traditional collage, but fluidity and transparency, drifting together and showing through each other to enhance the meaning and beauty of each image.

Carson Gladson has often cited Paul Cezanne as one of his artistic heroes and the influence of this world renowned French Post Impressionist is clear in Gladson's work. As with Cezanne, Gladson's work carries the use of color, mark making, modeling, and expressive use of light to a new level. Out of his paintings, drawings and digital collage emerges a moving semblance of a familiar natural world containing a deepened harmony that invites meditation.

These works feature a centrally placed vanishing point with an unseen light source reflecting from below – a metaphor repeated particularly in his Mountain Mist series of paintings.

Over the years Gladson has been extraordinarily prolific – the volume of his work is staggering and calls out for a true chronicling. He is a distinctly American artist, not only because of his subject matter but also because of his particular response to the grand vistas and character of light that is omnipresent in the Southwestern United States.

Barbara Pflaumer
Former Associate Vice President for Communications
and Marketing Los Angeles County Museum of Art



ABSTRACT PAINTINGS

"View from the Cave"
2007

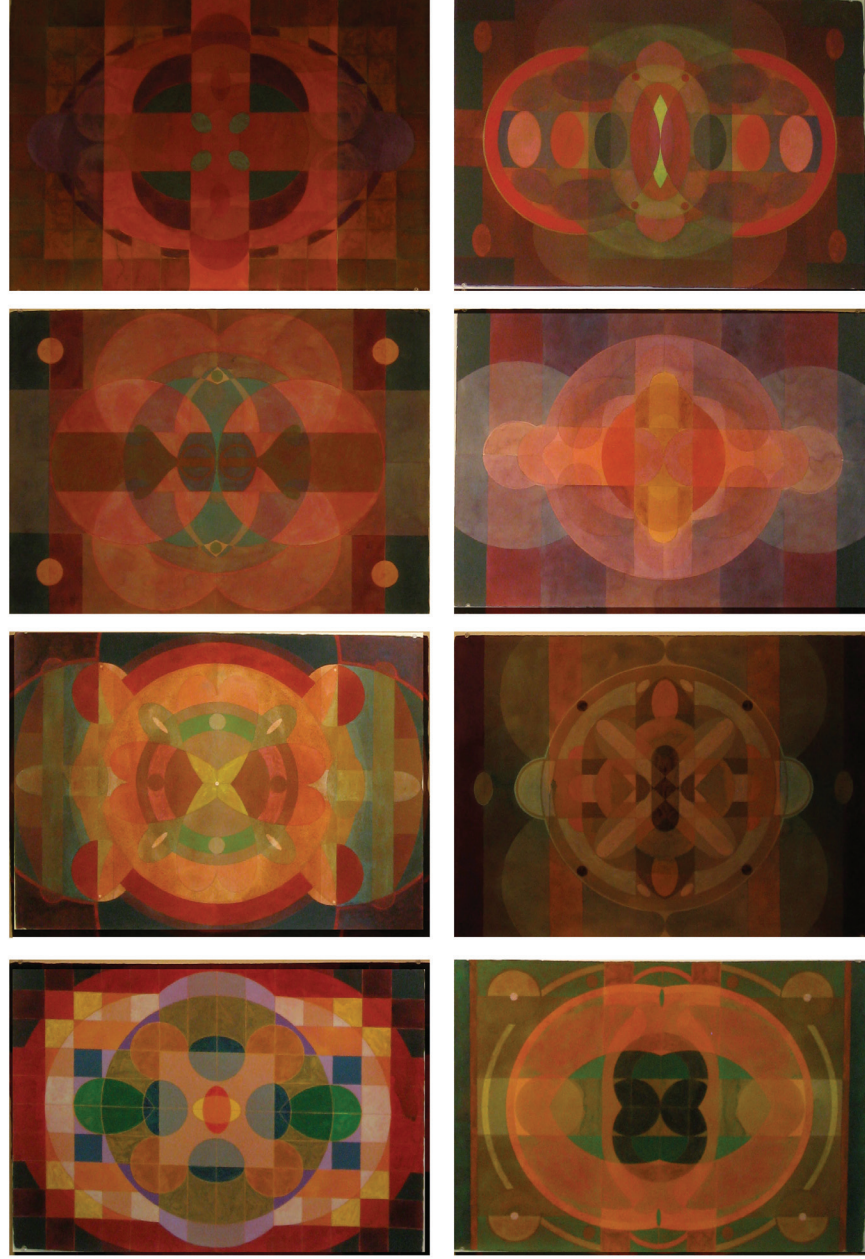






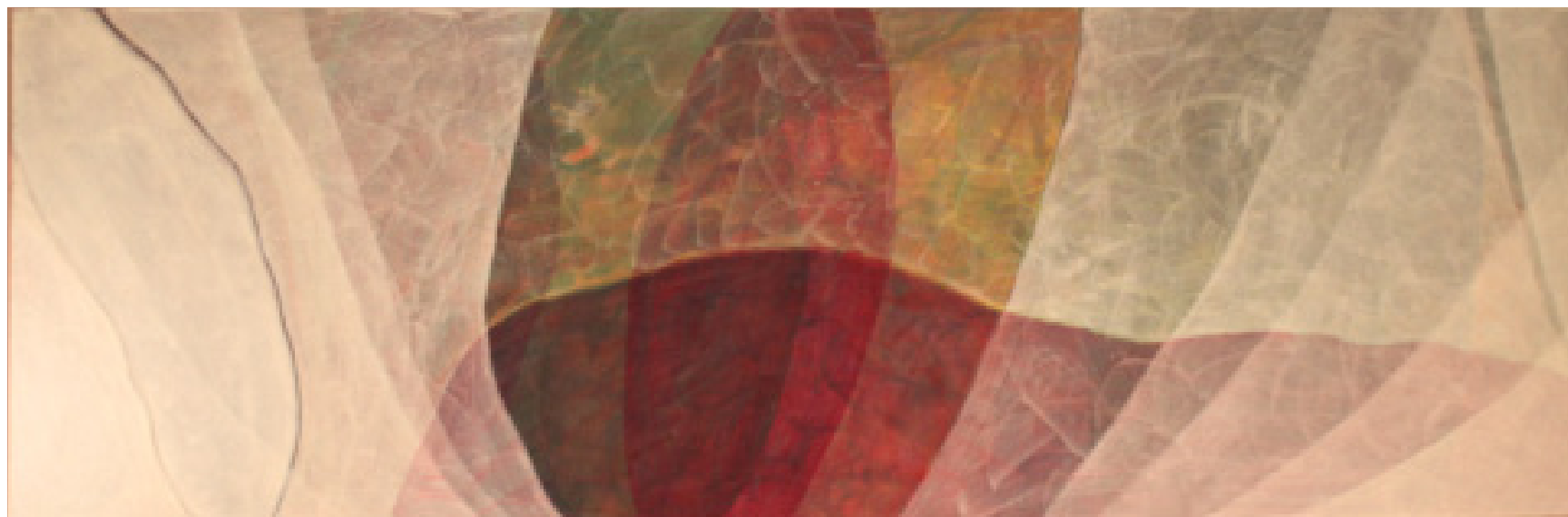


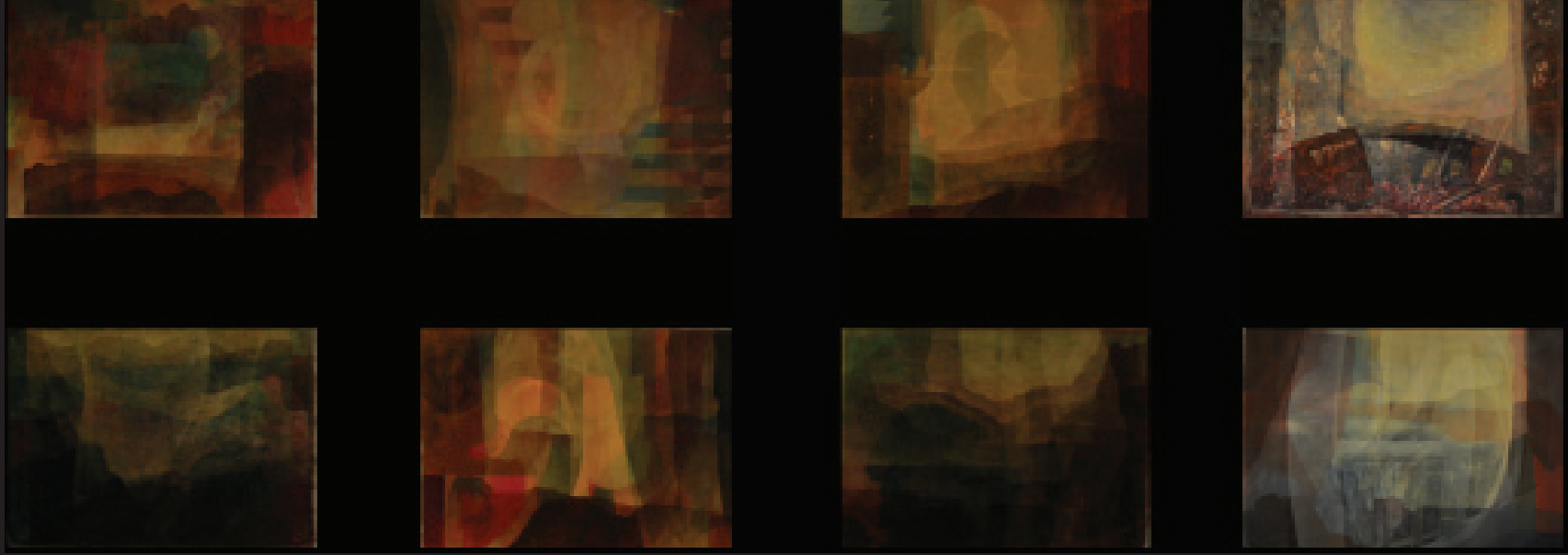
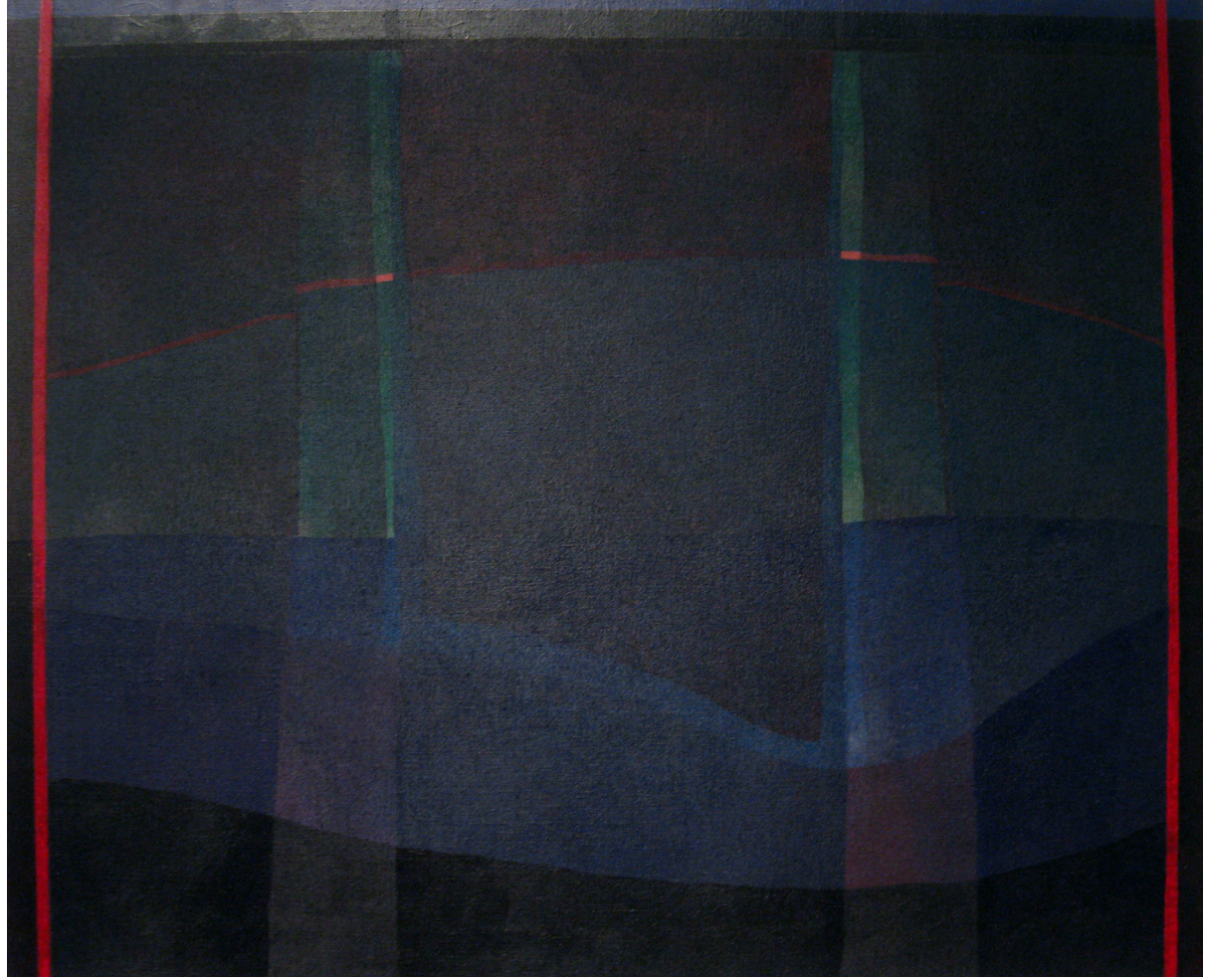
"Rain 2" 2007





"Falling Leaf" 2006







DIGITAL PAINTINGS





LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS

"Garden Row" 1985-91





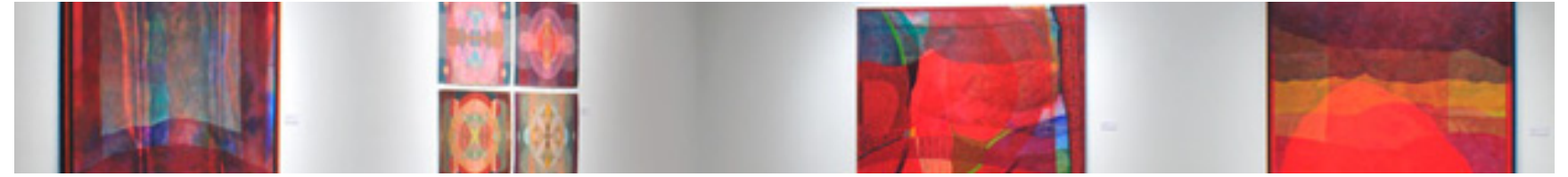
"Mist in the Valley" 2007







"Grasses & Field" 1985-91



SELECTED REVIEWS



“If the issue is personal authenticity then Carson Gladson has attained it. His composition, always sensitive and surprising...shows himself a rare one who is willing to put by the gravy train for a growth as slow and organic as the nature he obviously loves so well. He represents a type of rapidly disappearing artist and human being.”

- **William Wilson (Los Angeles Times)**

“Gladson is one of those unique individuals who can take a single idea and expand it into any numbers of self-contained variations of deeply evocative symbolism, a soft, lyrical poetry.”

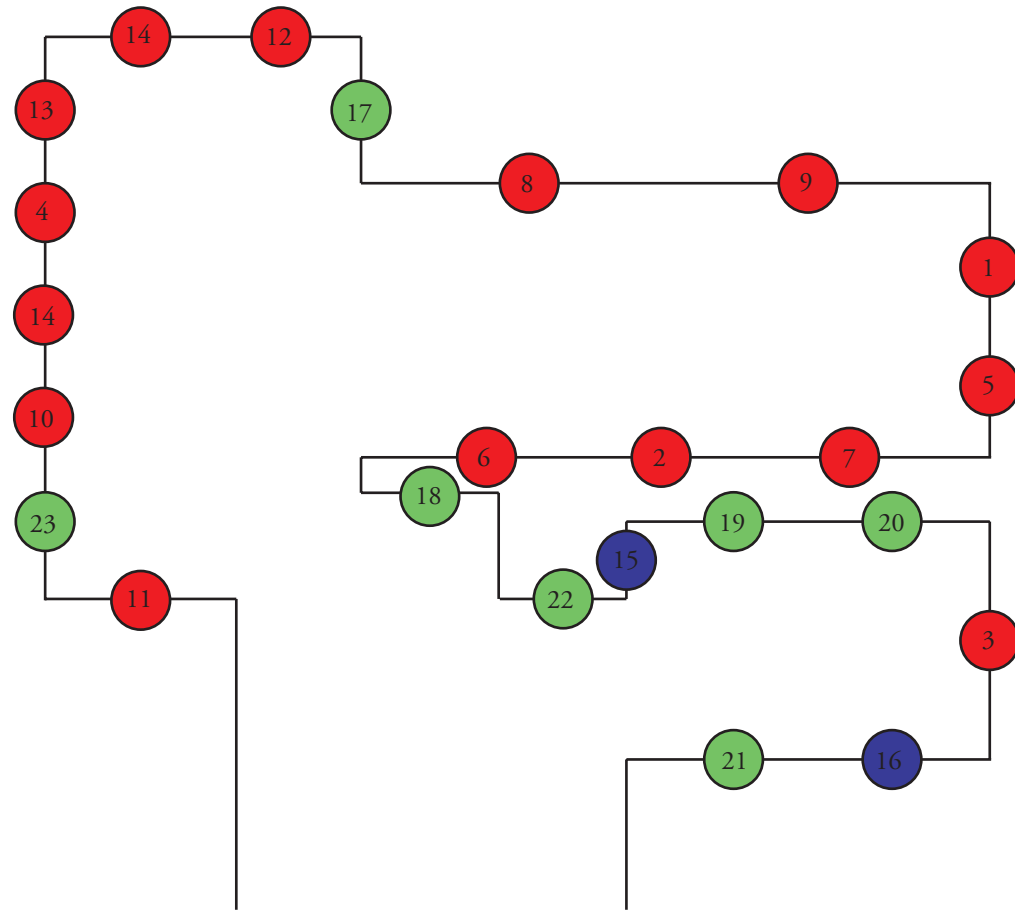
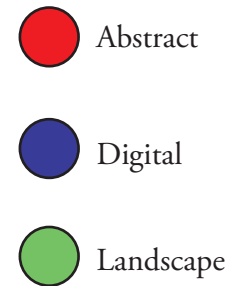
- **Thomas Albright (San Francisco Chronicle)**

“...there is quiet, almost shy invitation to share delights - delights in nature, in color and forms, and their relationships... most of these have been transposed by a vivid and sensitive artist into lovely, allusive symbols.”

- **Virginia Laddey (Independent Press Telegram)**

“His work is immediately likable because of the elegance of his shapes and the beauty and richness of his colors. These works maintain their interest to viewers over a span of time due to their strength and integrity...it is a distinct pleasure to be able to wander through Carson’s gardens of calm, bright images.”

- **H.L. Weeks (former curator and Director of the Long Beach Museum of Art)**



ABSTRACT

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DIGITAL

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LANDSCAPE

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