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An outpouring of art

The prolific Edna Andrade, who worked exclusively in Philadelphia until her death in 2008, is the subject of two current exhibitions by admirers determined to keep her legacy alive.

By Amy Rosenberg, Inquirer Staff Writer

One thing pretty much everyone who ever encountered the late Philadelphia artist Edna Andrade in her home or studio seems to remember: vodka martinis, offered with gusto at any hour.

Beyond that quirk of hospitality - which she continued into her 90s, tendering drinks with a biting, witty intellect and generosity on the side - Andrade's decades of flamboyant artistic output continue to reverberate in the artistic psyche of Philadelphia.

Philly was a place Andrade never left, spending her career teaching at Philadelphia College of Art (now University of the Arts) and creating in Center City. The city buoyed her, and her op art paintings put her in elite company, but her location may have kept her reputation in the overall art world more muted than it deserved to be.

Now, four years after her death at 91, two Philadelphia exhibitions tell the tale of vastly different periods of Andrade's artistic life: an early era of watercolors, collages, and ink drawings of abstracted landscapes, and a middle period of screen prints (some are posters, some for Philadelphia events or institutions) based on her familiar hard-edged, geometric optical art.

Taken together, the shows - at the Print Center on Latimer Street and the Locks Gallery on Washington Square South - also are evidence of a passionate movement to keep Andrade's name and spirit humming on the local art scene. It's a hum not unlike the one you feel while staring at some of her op art, including her famous Color Motion 4-64, an undulating, geometric black-and-white beehive.

"We miss her," said Sueyun Locks, director of the gallery, which continues to represent Andrade's work. (She remembered the artist's request that she bring vodka - and only vodka - when she came for a lunch date near the end of Andrade's life.) "She taught a lot of students. They all come and say, 'Edna was the one who gave me ideas.' She has a pragmatic side of her, telling them yes, you can do it. In not being vague, she taught them how to survive as an artist."



John Caperton of the Print Center holds Andrade's screen print "Red Flash." The show there includes posters, among them a wordless psychedelic work sold alongside posters for rock groups of the '60s.



Jeremiah Misfeldt prepares to hang Andrade screen prints at the Print Center, where wallpaper inspired by her designs will be a bold - even dizzying - backdrop.



Locks said Andrade inspired not only artists but also design and graphic students who went on to successful careers (one was involved in designing branding art for the Louvre Museum).

The works in the Locks exhibition were found in a half-dozen flat files, combed through after her death, that were filled with work Andrade kept in her apartment and studio at Logan Square. From the early 1960s, they include abstract landscapes and collages, sunrises and beachscapes, a detailed Fairmount Park tree and a lovely, almost heart-shaped work called Atom Cloud.

There is also a watercolor and gouache on illustration board with the words “Plywood to stand the test of time,” a mockup for an advertisement (undated, but likely from the Mad Men era of the early 1960s) that in its pragmatism links to the works at the Print Center.

Locks said that while the art in the gallery’s show is for sale (prices range from \$6,000 to \$12,000), the hope is to place much of Andrade’s work in museums. “That’s our mission,” she said.

The original Color Motion 4-64 is in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. But the Print Center - whose Andrade show takes its name from the work - shows Color Motion 4-64 in two other ways: as a 1965 screen print, and as a 450-piece jigsaw puzzle made by Springbok Editions in 1966.

John Caperton, the Jensen Bryan curator of the Print Center (who fondly remembers his own little vodka afternoon soirees with Andrade), says the show is a tribute to Andrade’s democratic view of art, and her interest in design and even commercial printing; most of the work is later than what’s being shown at Locks.

Caperton said Andrade used unfussy print methods, sometimes ordering prints based on previous images. “The hand of the artist is not crucial,” he said, though Andrade was known for her incredibly precise artistic hand, honed in draftwork for her architect husband, who when he left her, freed her up, she often noted, for a more expansive career.

“She did a lot of design work during her career,” he said. “She did public artwork, taught design. There was this proud nature to her work. She talked a lot about the importance of applied art.”

In the Print Center show are posters created for the Philadelphia Civic Center and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and for a fund-raiser after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination that Andrade organized. There’s also a hippie-dippy wordless psychedelic poster that Caperton says was sold in a typical poster shop alongside the typical Jefferson Airplane/Iron Butterfly posters of the 1960s.



Despite that populist bent, Caperton said, when he read Andrade's old lesson plans he realized her work was founded on principles of everything from astrophysics to Freudian psychology. She hosted dinner parties for all manner of intellectuals, and took fuel from their discussions, he said. One work in the show, *Black Dragons*, had nothing to do with dragons, he discovered, but was based on the physics concept of "lines curving but never crossing," known as a dragon curve. "I thought it was some kind of science fiction, but actually, it was astrophysics."

At the Print Center, several walls are covered with wallpaper inspired by Andrade designs, with her optically vivid prints boldly hung on top, mismatching optics be darned. Caperton said the center gave a little thought to how the work would or would not clash with itself, then decided to just move on. So a wedding planned for Oct. 7 at the Print Center will have an especially dizzying backdrop, but the groom, Amze Emmons, 37, a print artist himself, couldn't be happier.

"The work is kind of timeless," Emmons said, touring the space with fiancée Jena Osman. "It hasn't aged at all. It's totally captivating. I'm sure she was a trailblazer for some of the ideas I use in my work."

Caperton hopes the show will drive home the link he sees between her work and young Philadelphia print artists currently working, like Andrew Jeffrey Wright, founder of Space1026, a funky second-floor art studio in Chinatown with a silk-screen printer in the back and a coating room that once was a walk-in jewelry safe.

"I have one of her pieces taped to my sketch book," says Wright, 41, whose own work echoes Andrade's geometric boldness. "I would see her work for years."

The piece he had taped, from a flier, was, naturally, *Color Motion 4-64*. "It's like four checkerboard-like parts that are bubbled out," he said. "I had all these other types of abstract art full of color in my sketchbook. I taped her black-and-white piece in the center of this color piece."

He said he was excited about the Print Center show and thought artists and printmakers like himself would find much common ground with this matriarch of the Philadelphia art world who embraced abstraction, op art, design, and the mass appeal of printmaking, much as he and others continue to do.

"There's definitely a connection," he said. "I think Philadelphia is a big printmaking city. I think in the last five years there's been a resurgence of abstract pieces. I definitely think that show will be an inspiring and interesting show for a lot of people to see."

And, as Edna might say, they should feel free to bring the vodka.



"Black Diamond," 1967.

"Works on Paper: 1959-1962" at Locks Gallery, 600 South Washington Square, through Oct. 30. Hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday. Information: 215-629-1000 or www.locksgallery.com

"Color Motion: Edna Andrade Prints" at the Print Center, 1614 Latimer St., through Nov. 17. Hours: 11 a.m.-6p.m., Tuesday-Saturday. Information: 215-735-6090 or www.printcenter.org