

# arbus

THE ARTS & BUSINESS MAGAZINE OF NORTHEAST FLORIDA  
MARCH/APRIL 2015



1

ONE SPARK<sup>™</sup>  
ART EXPERIENCE

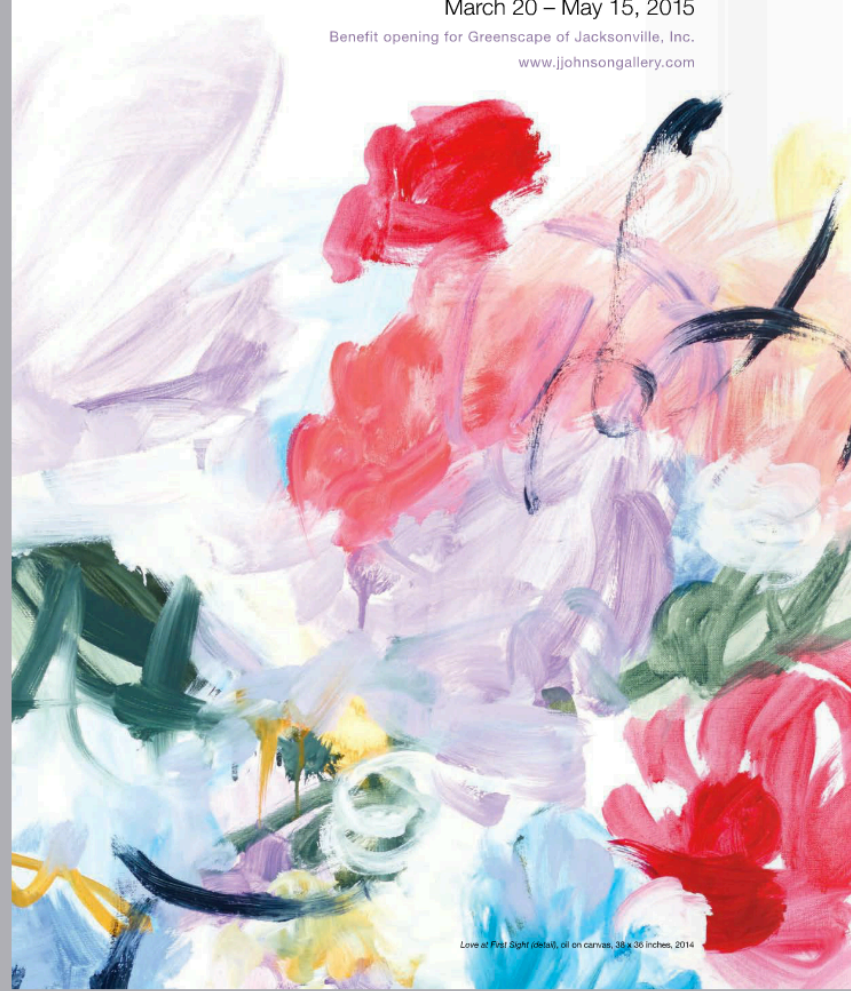
CATALYSTS OF CHANGE: BUSINESS WOMEN | CUMMER: GARDENS AND REFLECTIONS

## Yolanda Sánchez

March 20 – May 15, 2015

Benefit opening for Greenscape of Jacksonville, Inc.

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



Love at First Sight (detail), oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches, 2014

THE PAINTINGS OF YOLANDA SÁNCHEZ  
*There is Only the Dance*

By Wesley Gibbon

For Miami Beach artist Yolanda Sánchez, the arts – and color specifically – hold an intrinsic role in her life and work. “When I read poetry or listen to music, I see color images,” she shares. Sánchez, who emigrated from Havana, Cuba, at the age of seven with her mother, a classical concert pianist, recalls: “One of my prized gifts and possessions as a child, especially since we did not have much money, was a gold paper-lined box of Prismacolor pencils.” Though Sánchez first launched her professional career after earning a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Florida State University, twenty-four years into practicing and teaching psychology she changed course to answer her true





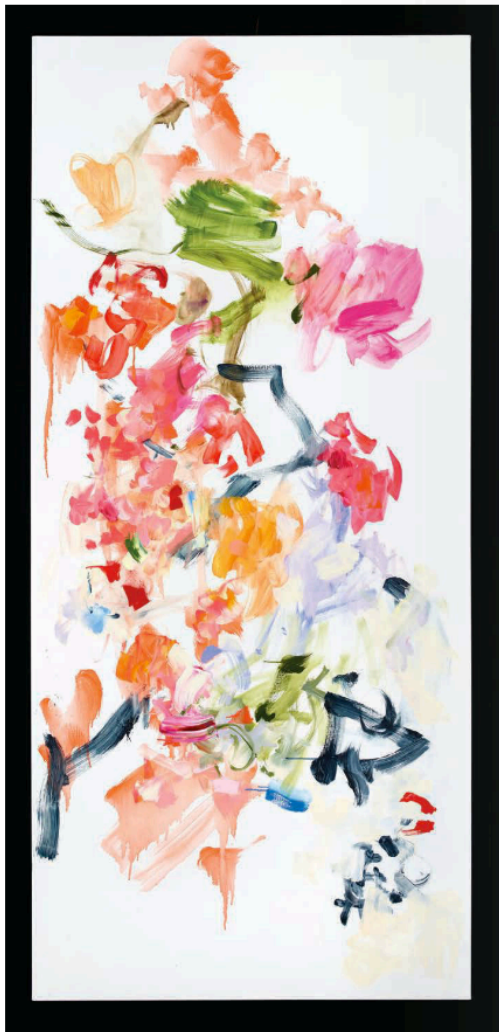
creative calling. She returned to academia to study the visual arts, delving into classical and contemporary painting in Spain as a Fulbright scholar before receiving her M.F.A. in Painting from Yale University School of Art. "As I formalized my art training, the artists that always interested me (then and now) were the great colorists: Matisse, Bonnard, Van Gogh, Monet, Mitchell, Diebenkorn," Sánchez relates.

The artist describes the use of color as a "completely intuitive process," and is diligent about color studies, which ensure clean pigments and just the right hue. Her vibrant palette is filled with the fecundity of South Florida's landscape – lush and fresh – tangerine like the morning sun and azure like the shimmering sea. Sánchez enjoys experimenting with her palette as juxtaposing different hues can offer unexpected results, such as a delightful pop of red or brilliant pink against a wash of cool color.

At the still point of the turning world.  
Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards;  
At the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement.  
And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered.  
Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline.  
Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is  
only the dance.

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) (excerpt from Four Quartets).

The artist gleans verbal inspiration from poetry and songs and culled the title of her third solo exhibition at J. Johnson Gallery, *There is Only the Dance*, from the beautiful prose of T.S. Eliot. The expat poet, who came to prominence in post-war Europe, completed *Four Quartets* soon before receiving the 1948 Nobel Prize in Literature. Each of the quartets in Eliot's opus represents the classical elements earth,



water, air, and fire, and together they offer a meditation on nature as well as mindfulness and the Middle Way. Eliot reminds the reader that by dwelling on what might have been or dreaming about the infinite future, they can miss the "still point" and stifle the creativity and beauty that exist in the present moment.

As a devoted student of Zen Buddhism it is understandable that Eliot's themes, which are aligned with the Buddhist principle of the Middle Way, speak to Sánchez. She has drawn personal and professional inspiration from meditative practices as well as Asian art and culture. "I connect to the power behind the aesthetic processes, that is, to what is fundamental in Asian art: an awareness of nature and spirit, of an invisible force."

Compositionally Sánchez is inspired by Japanese painting and her multi-paneled works are reminiscent of folding screens from the Rimpa school of painting, which emerged in 17th century Kyoto with an emphasis on nature and the seasons. The emphasis on negative space evidenced in Asian art is also integral to her creative process. The artist has twice traveled to Japan, visiting artists' studios and immersing herself in the country's traditions, foods, and landscapes.

More recently she was invited to lecture on color – the element that connects her paintings to her body of *Bojagi* textile works (a decorative Japanese tradition of sewing fabric pieces together to create unique wrapping or functional items like bedcovers) – at a forum in South Korea. This was a return trip to the country after presenting an outdoor installation of her *Bojagi* works two years earlier. Yet it is not just color, but the absence of it as well, that is so integral to her creative process. "White is critically important to my work, not just as a design/compositional element, but as something much more. White suggests emptiness, a space in which the viewer can enter, inhabit and breathe. White makes the other colors stronger and clearer ... and in a surprising way, it awakens our senses."

Sánchez's knowledge of Asian art contributes to the quality of her mark-making and the rhythmic brushstrokes behind the gestures in her oils on canvas. "The Three Perfections in Asian art – calligraphy, painting, and poetry – are three things that directly influence my work, that I study myself," says Sánchez. Since ancient times the Chinese have regarded a fusion of these artistic elements, the rich visual combination of words and images, as essential to producing the ultimate in creative expression. Harmoniously combining this trio of artistic processes into a single work of art encourages a deeper mental processing and explains why writing is frequently incorporated into Chinese paintings. Meaning "beautiful writing" in Greek, calligraphy offers a visual experience of the balance between stillness and movement that can be appreciated



whether or not the viewer can read the characters. "My study of Chinese and Japanese art and my experiences working with a Sumi-e master have been central, especially as I integrate drawing and painting."

"Yolanda's calligraphic lines recall both the elegant gestures of Cy Twombly and the allure and magic of Joan Mitchell," notes Bruce Dempsey, director of Jacksonville Beach's J. Johnson Gallery. Sánchez's familiarity with the great colorists affords another dimension to the painter's visual vocabulary. "Even Pollock is very calligraphic. Brice Marden as well, though he is much more controlled," Sánchez notes, commenting how Marden's work changed after he discovered traditional painting in China.

Sánchez explains that her work materializes "contemplation about encounters with nature and honoring the physical world." However, she notes that, "as an abstract gestural painter, my compositions are inseparable from color, mark, paint and surface, light and space. These elements are part of my subject, as is the process of making."

There is *Only the Dance*, Yolanda Sánchez's third solo show at J. Johnson Gallery, is a refined body of work that is at once turbulent and serene. There is a variety of large and small paintings including several polyptychs that form a cohesive body of work while maintaining each painting's own identity. There is ample negative space for the viewer's eye to pause, delighting in her translucent washes and sinuous splashes of color. Sánchez's fresh brushwork presents a lyrical vocabulary that includes both delicate lines and broader strokes that embrace and enchant.

"Nature, in a very broad sense, is my source of inspiration but I am not recreating the external world," says Yolanda Sánchez. Instead of representational painting, the artist is paying homage to the magnificence that surrounds us. "My work is about the celebration of beauty in the world, about the brilliance of culture and our shared humanity."

*Opens at J. Johnson Gallery Friday, March 20th, artist's reception 6 to 8 p.m. Benefiting Greenscape of Jacksonville, Inc. and the public is invited to attend with a donation to the organization at the door. Runs through May 15.*