



# Prelude to an Opening

A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES INTO THE PREPARATIONS FOR AN ART SHOW OPENING NIGHT

BY KRISTEN LOWE

Two accomplished Minnesota artists are assembling their work for opening night at Circa Gallery, an independent gallery in the Warehouse District of Minneapolis. “The pairing was natural,” says Annie Metzger, Circa Gallery director, of the combined exhibit of Ellen Richman’s oil paintings and Maren Kloppmann’s ceramics. “They share a similar aesthetic creating an organic surface that reveals the artist’s hand inside the framework of pure abstraction. In both artists, you can see the layers of thoughtful color selection working

with architecturally clean lines.”

Located at 210 North First Street, Circa Gallery was established in 1991 and exhibits regional and national artists. Before they select an artist, Metzger looks at past and current work and hears what their plans are for future projects. “If that direction is moving forward and has a lot of artistic merit and a lot of interest and fits well with the gallery’s yearly calendar, I might schedule a show.”

## STUDIO PRODUCTION

Employing love and critical analysis, it often takes an artist a year and a half to more than two years to create enough artwork for a solo exhibition. Richman spends six months to a year on one painting, and generally works on three or four paintings at a time while the layers of oil paint dry. “It gives me time to really look at what is happening in each painting,” she says. Using a method of many New York abstract painters of the 1950s, Richman paints on un-stretched cotton canvas on the floor or wall in her Minneapolis studio. One sign of an abstract painting’s success, established by the early artists, is whether you can walk around the painting, or even turn it upside down or sideways, and the formal relationships – including color, texture, line and composition – still “look right” from any vantage point. Richman works and watches for a desired “tempo or rhythm” to develop – relationships between open and dense space, muted and saturated color, and how the eye moves through the composition. She strives with her improvisational manner of painting, to produce “an organic and rich tactile surface that has irregularities of pattern and vibrant color.” Richman does not have a predetermined idea of what a finished painting will look like.

Ceramist Maren Kloppmann is also working long days preparing for the Circa Gallery show in her self-designed studio neatly situated behind her own storefront in Northeast Minneapolis. Originally from Germany, Kloppmann describes herself as a potter by trade and a sculptor by development. “I am a process-oriented ceramist interested in creating a visual story of simplicity and clarity,” she says. Kloppmann works with porcelain, creating hand-built pieces from soft porcelain slabs as well as pieces thrown on a treddle-wheel. “By constructing each piece by hand, I seek to imbue the work with subtle imperfections while capturing precision and tautness in the quality of line, volume and edge,” says Kloppmann. The surfaces consist of combinations of glazes and Terra Sigillatas, used during the Roman Empire. Translated, Terra Sigillatas means “sealed earth.” For this exhibition, Kloppmann will deliver eight wall pieces with some seventy individual parts and pieces plus five freestanding sculptures. Each piece is sanded (twice), waxed and glazed (dipped or airbrushed), and fired three times at various temperatures in an electric kiln. She says she loses ten to fifteen percent of the work because it doesn’t survive the firing due to stress fractures or other damage. Laughing, she tells how her husband, completely dismayed, tries to understand the logic: >

PINK LUCINDA by ELLEN RICHMAN [ABOVE] OIL ON CANVAS, 2010. THE BACKROOM AT CIRCA GALLERY [RIGHT].



SHIELD CIRCLE by MAREN KLOPPMANN PORCELAIN, GLAZE, TERRA SIGILLATA, 2011.

“You spend countless hours laboring over every detail of these pieces and then put them into a machine that could destroy them? And you live and breathe for this?” He’s right, that’s just what she does. It’s one of many details that will never be seen by gallery visitors.

### PRESENTING FINISHED ARTWORK

While Kloppmann completes her artistic process

in her ceramic gallery and studio, Richman brings her work to Museum Services located in Minneapolis, which provides restoration, conservation, packing, travel protection and framing for regional artists, art patrons and museums. A half-dozen paintings were being held in Museum Services’ storage area which owner Russ Belk carefully maintains between 68- and 72-degrees and 45- to 55-percent

humidity. He explains this is the ideal climate for oil paintings and art frames. Richman uses the Gallery Wrap technique to frame her paintings. This is a process of wrapping the painting over wooden bars from the front, around all sides, neatly tucked behind and carefully attached with a staple gun. The result gives the painting a unified, smooth and more sculptural appearance. Framer Kevin Miller makes an additional second wooden frame inside the stretcher bar frame at Richman’s direction. Richman adopted this trick after having several paintings warp from frames lacking enough structure. “You learn these things the hard way, from experience,” she says. In the last two weeks before the opening, she and the framer will stretch and frame about twelve paintings, ranging from 24-inches to 62-inches in width.

### INSTALLING THE SHOW AND OPENING NIGHT

Before the gallery doors open, corks popped or savory snacks prepared for a free public reception, there is much work to be done. Vital activities of selecting the final collection from the artists’ finished works, building relationships, and addressing clients’ expectations and tastes require precise planning. The gallery itself needs to be prepared and walls prepped, advertising and promotion set into motion, and sometimes orchestrating sneak previews for highly motivated clients. Concurrently, art must be installed at the proper height, grouped effectively, spaced to allow enough breathing room and properly lit so it is visually compelling and pleasing to the eye. Metzger starts the process by spreading out selected art, trying numerous layouts and doing lots and lots of shuffling until she sees the right relationships in terms of colors and contrast. “The whole gallery is like a canvas, you’re balancing its composition like a work of art,” says Metzger, an artist in her own right.

The Kloppmann and Richman exhibition will run from March 9 through April 14. ■