

Barbara Kemp Cowlin  
[barbara@barbaracowlin.com](mailto:barbara@barbaracowlin.com)  
520 896 2824

When I wander around interiors and exteriors of the built landscape I am aware of the details of edges, angles, shapes, colors. The way that light illuminates these solid surfaces and makes them glow captivates me.

These impressions are where the paintings in the “Askew” series begin. They are full of deliberate contradictions: solidly colored shapes vs mottled; hard edges vs ragged; wacky color combinations with bright colors against muted; and angles, where I contrast accurate perspective with skewed angles to create confusion. Taking a solid form and making it luminous and ethereal creates its’ own contradiction. The paintings investigate the way in which the elements of color, shape, pattern and perspective define and transform spatial relationships.

The purpose of these contradictions is to create the combination of beauty with unsettling elements that sneaks up on the viewer. A creepy sense of humor from unrelated elements slips into the paintings. Jarring colors don’t make sense until they do. The relationship between abstraction and representation creates additional tensions between the pictorial and actual space for the viewer to puzzle out.

There is a story to be told and it’s up to viewers to create their own reaction to and theory about about what is happening.

This series began as an experiment on a group of 10 inch square panels and has grown to an 8 foot by 8 foot painting on which I am currently working. I have completed 78 paintings of varying sizes in the series over the past 2 1/2 years.

I use wood panels as my substrate so that I can build layers, sand and build again. The flexibility and forgiveness of acrylic paint allows me freedom to explore using the medium in new and exciting ways.

I start paintings with acrylic washes in several colors on an absorbent ground. Over the washes I lay out basic forms and add colors which both describe the form and create ambiguity of space.

My process includes positioning of the forms on the picture plane deliberately creating instability and causing the viewer to pause to parse out what they are seeing. From photographic references, the paintings evolve in various ways. I don’t feel the need to stick with what initially attracted me and have added fanciful elements and unusual invented color combinations to the mix. A collaboration results—the painting dictates what it needs, I dictate my own vision and between the two the paintings are born—not without a struggle. My intention is for the end result to look deceptively simple yet complex enough to intrigue the viewer.

Painting has been central to my art practice for the past forty years. I was trained as a printmaker and the layering I create in my paintings reflects that influence. Painting is so compelling to me that it has overshadowed every other media I’ve experimented with and is my passion.