

Lydia Johnston's intuitive art

BY HAVEN LINDSEY

WHEN THE BODY SLEEPS, the soul awakens and it is in that moment when life's greatest manifestations materialize.

There are certain questions humankind will likely always struggle to answer. What is the meaning of life? What came first, the chicken or the egg? What happens when we die? And, then there's the question that generations of artists have struggled to answer.

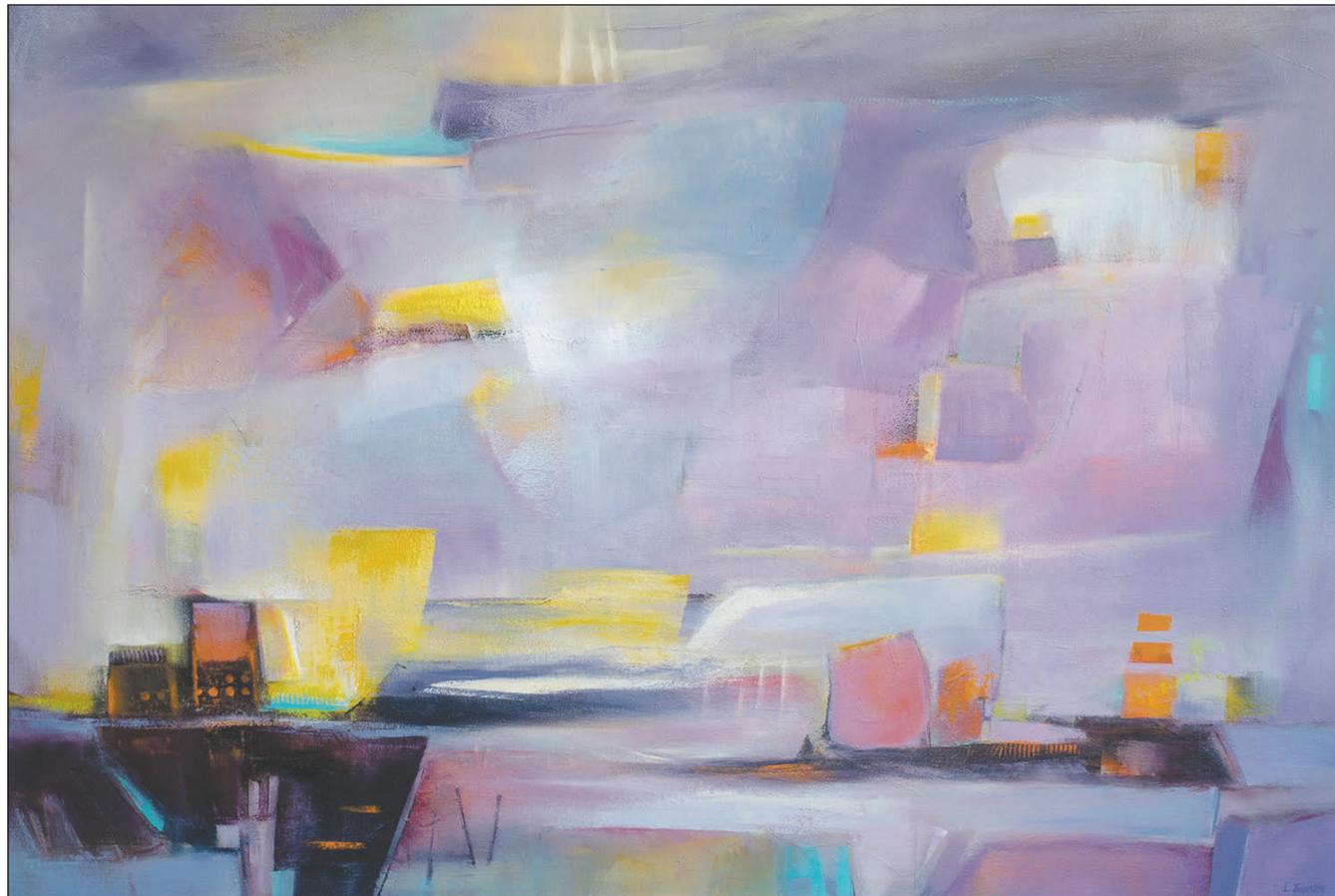
Ask a painter how they know when a piece of artwork is finished and they are not always sure. Some artists never know. For Lydia Johnston, that is not the case. This intuitive artist, who describes how the Taos light has seeped into her subconscious, brings more to her canvas than bold, colorful abstract strokes. Her intuition plays out on the canvas in an almost imperceptible way – exactly what one would expect from something that can be felt more than explained.

"I always know when a painting is finished when it passes my bedroom test," replied Johnston when asked the question that stumps many of her colleagues.

Like many artists, Johnston uses oil paints, brushes and an individualistic array of tools to bring a canvas to life. But she brings something that many do not. Johnston also uses her intuition to paint. She doesn't have a preconceived plan for what she might paint. One layer of color intuitively leads her to another as she joins the journey to see what the oils will render and where they will take her on that particular day.

Intuition, the sense we all have that cannot be explained by fact or thought, can be practiced and honed into a reliable source of information. For Johnston, her intuition not only guides her renderings on canvas, but it also helps to tell her if a piece is finished or if it needs a few more touches.

When the early morning light from the Taos mesa begins to appear in her bedroom, she bridges the 'not quite awake, not fully asleep' gap that she refers to as "shmirling." It is in this esoteric time when each of her paintings



COURTESY LYDIA JOHNSON

'Shades of Lavender' 24" x 36" oil on canvas

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Artist

goes through her "shmirling" moment. An admitted restless sleeper, Johnston is better able to see beyond the colors on her canvas and dive deeper into the values and contrasts during this innate awake-not awake time when the light has begun its daily genesis.

"I want my art to read well and for that to happen it must go beyond contrasting colors. I have a passion for color, but I want to see the underlying value of lights and darks." Johnston speaks of the dawning of nature's light like most of us speak about a light switch. "When the dawn light comes on, I can start to see the hints of color in my work. I'm not interested in flat shapes; I look for depth and dimension."

Johnston is currently working on a new collection. Because she uses many layers of oils, she typically paints six

to eight pieces concomitantly as she waits for each canvas to dry. Her inspiration comes from her surroundings which are fluid, yet one goal remains constant. "I don't want my paintings to tell the whole story. I want to hint at things to trigger memories or meaning. I always want a hint of grace although I'm not sure I know what that means."

Johnston wants to provide an opportunity for the collector to connect in a profound way. Whether that is called creating a thoughtful space or hinting at subtle grace, her style opens doors of thought and feeling. "I like the mystery of hinting at things and creating a sense of place. I want you to keep coming back and seeing something new. That's the connection I'm talking about, that thing that keeps you returning to the piece and seeing or feeling something new. There is an element of grace in that."

Johnston loves dots. Look closely and you'll see the hints of dots in her still-to-be-named new series. Rather than paint freeform dots, she relies on

unconventional techniques and tools to create her clever style. She uses rollers and mats she has made from unexpected, yet common, household items. She whimsically rolls or paints a row of dots where the eye may not be expecting them to be.

"Along with color, I love dots and patterns. I like to be playful," Johnston explained. Her work is a combination of hard and soft edges, brushed and tooled areas with a story underneath. "There's a history of things in the layers and that adds a richness."

Located on the expansive mesa on the El Prado-Arroyo Hondo line, her home studio is filled with easels and the tools of her trade, including her most current pieces. Johnston schedules open studio times to showcase and sell her art and she also has pieces for sale at magpie gallery in Taos. Her work ranges in price from \$400 to \$2,500. She is actively involved with the Taos Artist Organization and sends a monthly email to update her followers through her website at lydiajohnston.com.