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Claire Swedberg

Edison artist Margy Lavelle paints with conviction. In fact she pours so much energy into the process of moving paint across canvas she's been known to knock her piece down or punch a hole in it. She then makes that action another part of the piece. That recently happened as part of her series *The Flight of Gabriel*, and she coarsely patched that hole, and painted over it. The result is a piece that is at once rough, energetic and poignant – and that has its own story to tell.

Lavelle is not only a Skagit Valley artist but a gallery owner. Her Edison i.e. gallery (formerly known as the Edison Eye under the proprietorship of Dana and Toni Ann Rust) is now showing *The Flight of Gabriel* that features her oil on canvas, and oil sketches, through March 4. The following week begins a show of another iconic Skagit painter, Ed Kamuda. Throughout her career, Lavelle has been a physical and fearless painter. She gains as much from the process of painting as she does from seeing the finished product. She often enters the studio with a basic image but then diverges far from that image by the time she's finished.

Her latest series – which she completed in 18 months – started during winter bedrest as she recovered from pneumonia. In her involuntarily sedentary state she watched a lot of news. Images of refugees and the homeless, on her TV screen, caught her attention. "I found a kind of beauty and grace in how they constructed their shelters," she says. She began delicate oil sketches – she didn't have the strength at the time to accomplish her usual large canvas works with oil paint and palette knife. The resulting series is tender, showing how resourceful and creative humans are in the process of creating a home out of whatever resources were available.

The subsequent larger oil paintings depict symbols of grace on devastated landscapes and night skies. "*The Flight of Gabriel*" series was heavily influenced by the concept of archangels – something that captivated her as a child; but in this case the angels are represented by the most mundane objects – cups, windows and houses. Each glows with its own subtle luminescence.

Lavelle is from North Dakota, where she started painting as a teenager. She then attended Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. As an arts student at the University of Washington she studied under Jacob Lawrence, Robert C. Jones, Norman Lundin, and Elaine de Kooning.

"They were the kind of teachers who helped you find whatever it was you were about," she says, and in her case she was about pushing traditional subject matter into something she acknowledges was often more extreme. A pear in a still life might be larger than the viewer's head, for instance.

When Lavelle launched i.e. gallery with her then business partner, David C. Kane of Mount Vernon, she was taking a gamble. She has run it on her own for several years now, and the gallery serves her as a business but also as a gathering place for fellow artists, from the Skagit Valley, Seattle and elsewhere. At any given time, "I could have seven or eight artists sitting around the table," she says. "That's one of the things I love about having a long table."

Artists often work in isolation, especially those far from the cities. Through i.e. she is then able to offer a meeting place for them to share ideas, talk about their work and build a community.

After her show comes down, the Ed Kamuda exhibit begins, previewing March 7 and opening March 9, 4 p.m.