

Diana Cercone: Profile

Color blooms from Colleen Attara's Yardley studio

On this day, the temperature refuses to budge above 31 and the winds howling through the surrounding farmland blow colder still. The farm's rich soil surrounding Colleen Attara's three-room cottage studio takes on the fallow look of winter, its steely color reminiscent of cold oatmeal. Yet inside the stu-

dio colorful flowers bloom and greet me. They grow inside her windows and in her still-life paintings, some popping out in three-dimensional fashion, rendering a palpable energy that reaches out as if giving you a hug, or saying, "Hey, cheer up, you can do it." The bold, bright flowers

are part of Attara's signature; another is that they are all created from replaced business signs.

For Attara is an eco, or "green," artist, recycling old signs and windows and turning them into engaging works of art. To Attara, there are no such things as old windows or signs; they're just canvases waiting for her creative spin – and their new lives as works of art to brighten up homes or businesses.

Attara's creative spin is not an idle bromide, however, for if you delve deeper into her paintings – really smell her "roses" if you will – you'll find intelligent and spellbinding stories, many directed at encouragement or at the very least, a tranquil and inviting abode where you'd like to relax and hang out for a while. As if in her painting, the flowers thought the green shag carpeting was grass and grew wildly, Attara opts for lower case in her titles, saying, "they look gentler in lower case." Reminiscent of a Matisse boudoir, the room invites us in with its many colors, shapes and designs.

Attara often includes words in her paintings, such as in her painting "where I long to be." A beach scene, the four tropical colored cabanas or houses hold a sign, each with one word over its door: "Relax," "Ponder," "Rest," "Stay."



"her paint spilled across the valley."



"the icing on the cake."

"I painted it in the middle of winter," she says, having pictured it whole in her mind first. "I could even smell it before I painted it. Atmosphere is very important to me. Sounds, scents, light."

She paints with music on ("usually WXPN's 'Free at Noon,' Rufus Wainwright, Regina Spektor or classical") and candles burning.

The three windows in the room we're sitting in, the middle studio, sport mismatched curtains. "They're all different," she says. "They inspire me to do what I do ... colors ... come flying out of me." Attara also finds inspiration from her fellow artists in the Artists of Yardley, where she is a board member. Her studio sits across from the group's art center in the Janney House on Patterson Farm. Like her curtains, the artists are all different, she says. "I'm constantly inspired by them."

For the most part Attara's self-taught artist, yet the seeds for her artistic creativity stem from childhood. "According to my family, I was always creating – sewing, writing, building, painting."

It wasn't until 2002, however, that she started working full-time as an artist. Pulling a card out from a drawer, she shows me a miniature painting she did at the time while sitting at a table in her home with her young daughter. "It all started with this button,"

she says, pointing to a rum-colored wood button glued to the card. The button became a vase for her hand-drawn flowers. From that one button, she created an interior where a cup of coffee sits, its steam rising in wisps of black lines, waiting to be picked up. To the right, a handbag waits in anticipation of shopping, its drawn outline filled in by a tiny swatch of green, wooly material. Reusing things, she says, just comes naturally to her. "It's the only way I've ever painted. As an eco-artist, I use recycled material to create art. Keeping things out of the landfills, reusing things: windows, doors, plastics, glass." Plus, she says, "I like the way paint looks on glass. It looks dreamy ... creamy." (Attara is also a reverse glass painting artist.)

Even the paints she uses — mistake or "oops" paint from home improvement stores — are discards from the shelves. Sometimes she'll search for days to find the right colors to use in a painting. Often they're colors that normally you wouldn't think would go together, but somehow, Attara makes them work, creating a symbiotic and hypnotic harmony.

Attara's work is on view at "The Art of Recycling" exhibition at A Mano Verde in Lambertville, N.J., until Dec. 31.

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Millman and Dwyer: On stage

Promises made and promises broken

I am sure that when producers sold shares to "Promises, Promises" they led with the idea that, with Sean Hayes and Kristin Chenoweth in the leads of Chuck Baxter and Fran Kubelik, they had a sure thing.

Burt Bacharach songs are classic, and these two stars in the lead roles will guarantee a return on the investor's investments.

And indeed, next to a great story line that was originally seen in Billy Wilder's "The Apartment" and overall an excellent Burt Bacharach score, the main reason to see this revival are the leads.

Chenoweth is her generation's Bernadette Peters. She is a quirky petite, perpetually upbeat diva with an incredible voice. Hayes, as well, is a performer who I am more than happy to say is someone so incredibly talented that he could probably make a routine out of reading the phone book.

Regardless of material, an audience is going to be entertained watching either of these performers do what they do best. Rob Ashford as the director and choreographer has allowed them to do that, and that has created a most enjoyable evening for anyone who is lucky enough to catch this show.

All of the above is true and what also is true is it could have been better. The director could have made different choices, could have pushed the actors a bit more out of their comfort zone and could have jettisoned the additional songs that were totally unnecessary to the plot and stuck out like a growth.

The song additions were not a wise choice. All the other songs worked organically with the script, as well they should. They were written for the show and their lyrics and melodies were references to the dialogue and mood that preceded them.

This is not a piano bar or karaoke night where "I Say a Little Prayer for You" must be sung nightly. "A House is not a Home" was sung more appropriately in the television show "Glee" where Chenoweth again pined for a man she could not have. Let me hear these songs on a CD so I can enjoy the vocal performance and that is it. Do not put them willy nilly into a scripted show where they seem out of place.

The actors chosen for the leads are close to right for their roles but not exactly. The story is about a bachelor, Chuck Baxter, who works for a big insurance company, Consolidated Life. He is an office worker with aspirations of being a junior executive. He gets caught up



Sean Hayes and Kristin Chenoweth star in "Promises, Promises."

in renting out his apartment to his superiors so they can have steamy affairs with their secretaries or whoever without their wives finding out.

JD Sheldrake (Tony Goldwyn) is vice president of personnel and insists on exclusive rights to the apartment. In the meantime, Chuck Baxter wants to have his own romance with a waitress at the company cafeteria, Fran Kubelik.

Kristin is too perky and she needed to lose the California blond look. She should have gone a little less rosy cheek cheerleader.

Kubelik is a fascinating girl with a mood swing. There should be a needy person under her smile and that is something that never came across.

Sean Hayes has a great comic physicality. He is reminiscent of Jerry Lewis whom he played in the CBS TV movie "Martin and Lewis," where he received a Screen Actors Guild nomination for that role.

I do wish that when he sang "She Likes Basketball" that he did the original staging. This is director Rob Ashford's choice but Jerry Ohrbach's original 1969 version was more believable and sincere and had

a better emotional build. Ashford brings in the chorus ... that song only needs the actor to bring it home.

On the plus side, the Ashford opening sequence with office workers on rolling desks and coat racks was awesome. And I am not under 40, so I do not use that word lightly.

There is a moment in the show where Chuck Baxter feeling totally rejected picks up Marge MacDougal at a bar. This is a show stopping moment with a great song called "A Fact Can Be a Beautiful Thing." MacDougal's is a plum role that has won a Tony for both ladies who played the role on Broadway, Marion Mercer in 1969 and Katie Finneran in 2010. When Finneran became pregnant, she was replaced by the delightful and equally uninhibited free-spirit Molly Shannon from "Saturday Night Live."

Though different choices could have been made or executed by the director, anyone who sees this show during its run which closes Jan. 2, will be delighted by a wonderful show and cast ... and that is a promise you can believe in.

"Promises, Promises" continues at The Broadway Theater.

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