

ARTIST MICHELE HOBEN

Finding Her Artist's Voice

THE LIBERATING NATURE OF ACRYLICS
BY NATALIA MEGAS



Michele Hoben

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—Michele Hoben

"Congress," acrylic and graphite on paper, 22" x 30"

Mixed-media painter Michele Hoben views fences as paradoxes that simultaneously convey safety and fear—belonging versus not belonging.

"Nations have waged war and neighbors have spilled blood over their location," says Michele, whose most recent *Fences* series is a subtle commentary on our current political, economic and environmental status. The series began with a simple sketch of a bamboo fence until Michele realized, with more artistic exploration of the subject matter, she could make it powerful and meaningful.

"Are We Safe Yet?" asks how a structure such as a fence along the Mexican border can really render people safe. Other pieces were inspired by family relations instead of politics. "Play Ball," from an earlier *Fences* series, is about her grandfather. Other paintings incorporate wire fences that represent the family because "we're spread out [throughout the U.S.] but still connected," she says.

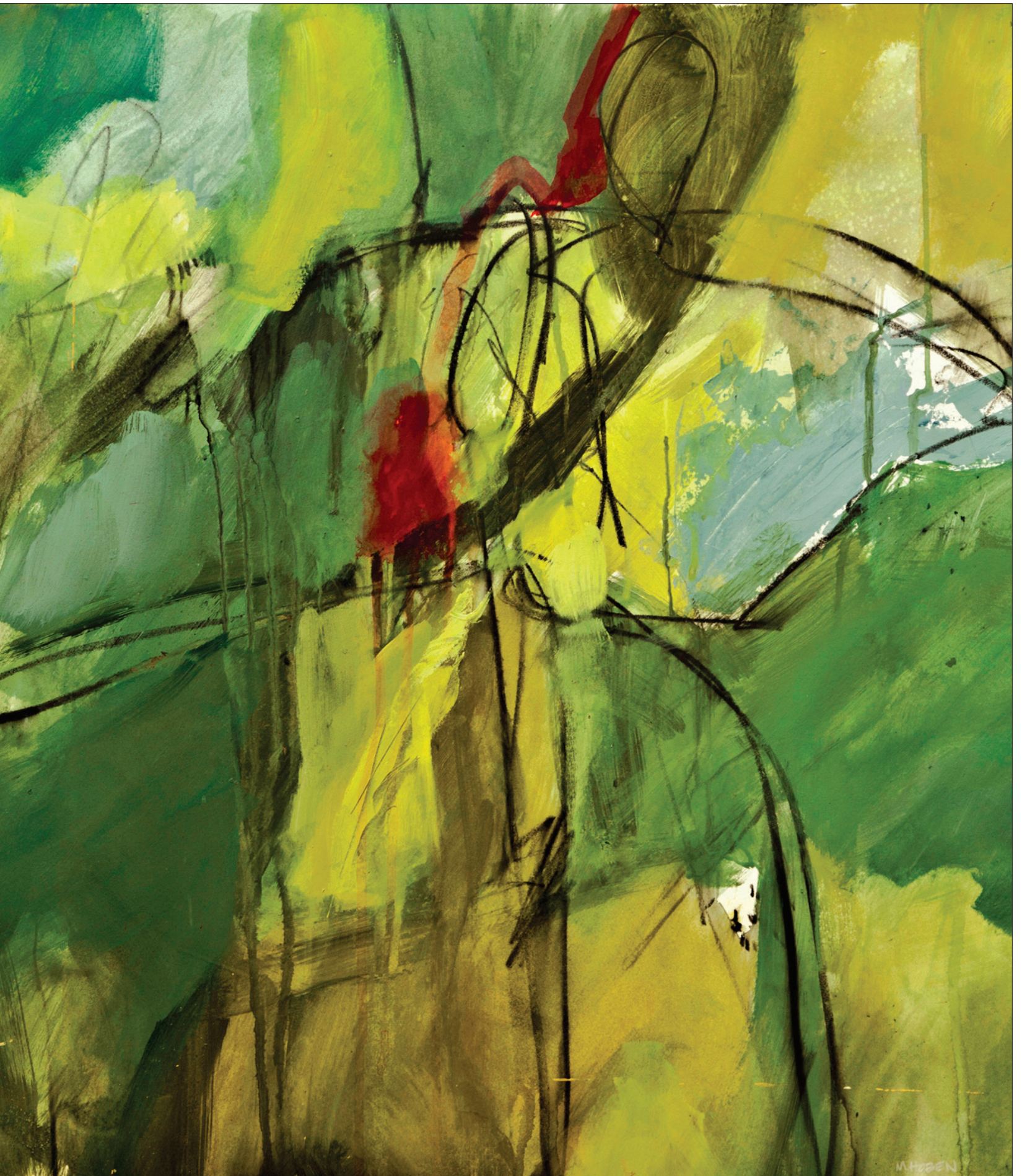
The Michigan-born abstract painter, whose work is primarily landscaped-based, studied architecture at the University of Michigan. Following graduation, Michele worked as an architect for years until she decided to pursue her longtime passion—art.

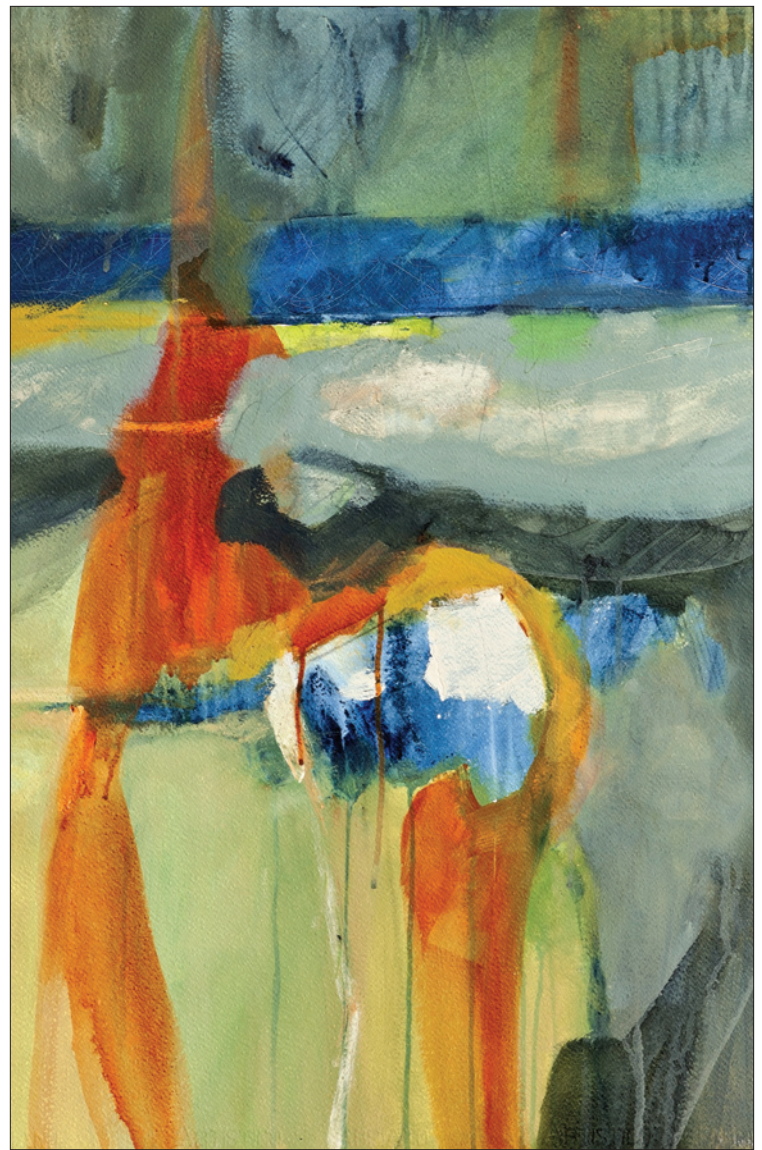
"My paintings draw upon the decades I've spent as an architect," she states.

Michele's primary means of communication is drawing on paper, initially in graphite or charcoal, creating many layers in acrylic paint or collage and then scratching through to find the original structure below it.

"This process parallels my love of the 'bones' of a building—what is behind the walls, under the flooring to the steel and concrete or wood structural frame," she states.







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—Michele Hoben

Opposite page: “Taos 1,” 22” x 22”

Above, left: “Storm Brewing,” 30” x 22”;
and “Earth Sky Earth,” 30” x 22”
All are acrylic and graphite on paper.

Michele remembers always dabbling in some kind of artistic endeavor as a child. Her father, an educator, and her mother, a social worker, encouraged creativity and imaginative play. “We never had coloring books; we just had blank paper,” she says. Michele recalls constructing forts beneath tables and building structures with plain blocks, using a hammer and string to keep things in place.

Although she started out as a representational artist, creating watercolor paintings of buildings, she eventually made the switch to abstract painting.

“It was not an easy transition, but it was where I wanted to go,” she says. “I felt a great deal of freedom with a different medium—in watercolor everything is so pre-planned; acrylic was liberating.”

One piece in particular marked Michele’s transformation from realism to abstract painting. The painting, which featured depictions of crows and alluded to casualties of the war in Iraq, was part of a 2006 exhibit called *Resolutions*. Michele viewed the show title as a reference to her quest to find her voice as an artist. A woman who came to the show told Michele the Native American creation story about

a crow that had to return the sun to the right side of the earth. Michele was struck by the ways in the story mirrored the focus of her own show, but she viewed the parallel themes as more than just a coincidence. “I don’t believe in coincidences,” she says. “We meet the people we are supposed to meet.”

Michele considers line, color and value to be her primary skill sets. “I think that my strengths are always in drawing,” she says. “As an architect, I was scared of colors. I started out as a value painter, but then I [became] more of a colorist.”

She is an artist who can find inspiration anywhere. “It’s just looking for it—seeing it,” says Michele. But she is also inspired by artists like painter Cy Twombly and sculptor Louise Bourgeois.

Michele’s advice to those who aspire to create art is to “do it and do it repeatedly. And be observant. Everything can contribute to your growth and development. Get out in the world,” she says.

Visit Michele in Studio 31 at the Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria. é

Michele Hoben | www.michelehoben.com

