

## Different strokes: Unlike styles united by color

**C**YNTHIA LAIT and Catherine Small both produce big paintings in strong colors, but their styles contrast markedly in the joint exhibit at the San Ramon Community Center.

In their written statements, Small talks about her art as a mirror reflecting reality, and Lait imagines windows of opportunity -- both challenging and hopeful.

The two artists certainly fill the lobby space -- known as the Lindsay Dirx Brown Gallery -- with color in this exhibit, which runs through November.

Lait, who lives in San Ramon, favors blocks of color with subtle details. "Purple Rain" is painted over fragments of textured paper affixed to the canvas. "L-580" seems to have the texture of a redwood burl.

"Password," one of the simplest yet most interesting works in the show, is both cool and dramatic in its horizontal format. It offers drifting black and yellow highlights on deep blue and gray fields.

A few of Lait's acrylic paintings are a little more representational but still open to interpretation. "Window of Opportunity" layers blocks of sky and clouds, and "Dagmar" is a mysterious, out-of-focus portrait of a figure that looks as if it's trying to reach us from another era.

Small, who lives in Pleasanton, goes directly for heightened -- but still mysterious -- emotions in her paintings. She calls the people she depicts "intriguing and vulnerable." More than anything else, they look deeply troubled.

"Mama's Kitchen" finds a dispirited man awaiting a meal, with a red-and-white checked tablecloth offering little cheer. Another sorrowful man shares a couch with a woman in "The Red Sofa," with a cigarette and two cups suggesting a thoughtful conversation.

Small excels at painting the folds of patterned fabric that sometimes enclose these scenes, such as a yellow beach blanket or rumpled blue-striped sheets. The figures in the foreground will suggest different dramas to different viewers. One can imagine a psychology class making a field trip to the gallery to diagnose their emotional distress.

