

Painter Callihan's impressionist work tranquil, inspired by Mich. landscapes

By *Peter Nichols*

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A dusty dirt road stretches out for miles, tapering off into the horizon and extending into a canopy of lush, green trees. The dark brown of the road is reflected in the dark browns and reds of the first leaves of autumn that appear in the foreground.

If the image seems familiar, that's because it may very well be - it's a scene taken from northern Michigan and filtered through the imagination and oils of artist Michael Callihan.

"Most of the work is derived from Leelanau Peninsula," Callihan said. "Some of it is my imagination, while some of it is from sketches and photos. I wanted to reflect the beauty of the peninsula and what I find there."

The painting, called "County Line," is one of many in Callihan's show, "Michigan Impressions: Oil Paintings by Michael Callihan," which is running until Dec. 31 at Saper Galleries and Custom Framing, 433 Albert Ave.

Describing the show as Michigan "impressions" was no accident, Callihan said.

"I think I'm inspired by the impressionists but more of the softened, dreamy look," he said. "They're just pleasing and relaxing somehow."

Callihan said he chose Leelanau Peninsula as his subject because of its unique beauty and the sheer variety of landscapes it offers.

"It's just something about the rows of vineyards and orchards and the surprising fields and vistas you see when you're driving through there across the peninsula," he said.

It was the tranquil quality of the images that drew the attention of Roy Saper, curator and owner of the gallery.

And it's that same sense of relaxation that will cause viewers to respond to Callihan's work because it stands in contrast to the current state of the world, Saper said.



"Michigan Impressions"

"Michigan Impressions: Oil Paintings by Michael Callihan" is running at Saper Galleries and Custom Framing, 433 Albert Ave., from now until Dec. 31.

The exhibit, which will feature 30 new paintings, is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Thursdays. Admission is free.

Source: Saper Galleries and Custom Framing

"He's painting things for just the love of painting," Saper said. "There's too much harsh activity in the world ... Callihan's work conveys a sense of repose, a sense of calm. It's standing back and saying this world is a lot more than headline news."

Saper, who has been running the East Lansing gallery since 1978, does not throw praise around lightly.

Of the 500 artists who vie for a place in the gallery, less than 1 percent are displayed, Saper said.

"No matter what (the artist) has done before," he said, "the only thing that matters here is if the work is quality and that it fills a void."

While Callihan admits that some might dismiss his type of paintings because of their softness, he said he paints them to stay true to himself and his tastes.

"Some critics might say it's not challenging what I do, but I don't know - it's what I do," he said.

Saper said despite the critics, Callihan's unique style is what sets him apart.

"They're paintings that connect with people," he said. "There is a place for beauty in art. Beauty in art is not trite."