



Spring passion, winter loss in 'Art of Love'

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Pop culture philosopher Greg Brady once quipped, "You have to be in love to love a love song." Maybe. And maybe you have to be in love to appreciate the works of Melinda Camber Porter.

The traveling collection of her verbal and painted art may not please those nauseated by sentimental lyrics or those who have fallen victim to spring fever and Cupid's arrow. But those not averse to matters of the heart will delight in her work.

L'Alliance Francaise de Houston is currently showing 23 paintings and four books that capture Porter's fresh, lyrical style.

The images, universal yet personal. Offer a panoramic view of love and a world of interlocking cultures where French, English and American sensibilities enhance each other and exist in harmony.

Melinda Camber Porter is a true Renaissance woman. Her remarkably versatile talents include those of a painter, poet, journalist, novelist, lyricist, playwright and translator.

After graduating from Oxford University with First Class Honor in Modern Languages, she lived and worked in Paris as a cultural correspondent to the *Times* of London. She continues to work in this position, now in New York.

Porter's journalism and poetry have appeared internationally in a wide array of publications. It's no wonder, her straightforward but lyrical style is a joy to read, no matter what the subject matter.

When she lived in Paris, her interviews with over 30 French cultural luminaries evolved into *Through Parisian Eyes*, a seamless and revealing depiction of French culture. The dominant trends in the country's artistic and political thought emerge vividly from her array of portraits and dialogues.

Many of her other works have a broader appeal. *The Art of Love: Love Poems and Paintings* is simply beautiful. Both the exhibition and the book of 60 love poems with her own paintings surround the viewer with sublime feelings. Leo Castelli, the exhibitions curator, compares Porter to William Blake, saying both are artists who "create a profound relationship between the visual and verbal worlds."



Her works explore love between woman and man, woman and parent and parent and child. They capture her sense of love as the actual desire to step inside another person's skin. Her vivid colors and impressionistic strokes often suggest multiple facets of the same people.

Explosions of saturated color cover her canvases and images of colors fill her poetry. Camber Porter uses autobiographical subject matter in works of oil and watercolor to evoke the multifaceted nature of a woman's psyche, self-definition and love relationships.

Romance flows from her paintbrush and pen in various forms. Some poems revolve around betrayal and the end of love. Others speak of deception and counterfeit love.

Saul Bellow describes the subject of *The Art of Love* as "the great meltdown of modern sexual anarchy." Yet the artist definitely reveals hope. She seems to say love is possible – at least some kind of love. And those who find it will be very happy. The lines of "Passion" and "In the Stillness" left me breathless. "Breaking Up" brought tears to my eyes.

The paintings capture the spirit of romance as well. Ethereal titles such as "Man and Woman in Infinity." "The Embrace," "Frozen Embrace" and "Guardian of Lovers" captivate the imagination, and the canvases fulfill those expectations.

I wish I could crawl in Camber Porter's watercolor "Couple by Water" or her oil "Women of the Self." Instead I'll settle for gazing happily at the works.

