

# Literally Abstract

## New Work by Dan Tran at Homewood Studios

by Kjrsten Holt



***SHE GLOWS IN THE DARK IN THE CITY OF SHARKS* by Dan Tran, digital archival print, 10x16 inches**

Dan Tran: New Work – Painting and Photography” at Homewood Studios, June 8 through June 23, is a two-part show by Vietnamese American artist and retired engineer Dan Tran. The show consists of more than a dozen oil paintings – the theme is “Abstract Activism & The Pursuit of Truth” – and as many framed digital photomontages in a series called “Primitive.” Tran’s photographs begin on the wall nearest the gallery entrance, a door set diagonally on the corner that used to open into a North Minneapolis neighborhood grocery store. On the opposite walls, abstract paintings face the visitor.

The framed photographs are multi-layered prints, most of them include color and monochrome images of people and landscapes that, in the artist’s words, “link our modern-day thoughts and actions with age-old instincts.” Themes of technology, individuality and human behavior are portrayed in *SHE GLOWS IN THE DARK IN THE CITY OF SHARKS*, a collage of mostly deep blue tones. The focal point is a seated woman, looking up over her shoulder apprehensively, as a row of images above her depicts the modern architecture of a large city. Flanking her are four repeated images of a shark under a deep sea. The handrail next to the woman continues into the waters by one shark, looking like a ray of light in the deep. Most of the rest of the photographic works are of the same or similar size and orientation – about 10 by 16 inches.

Tran’s paintings are larger and more varied in size, with the largest approaching 48 by 48 inches. Many of the paintings incorporate a spiral motif, which the

artist explains as the continuing search for self-knowledge. Philosophers, innovators and activists are name-checked in the titles of the works, including Socrates, Tim Berners-Lee, Malala Yousafzai, and Miles Davis. In *MILES DAVIS’ IMPROVISATION* (oil on canvas, about 48 by 36 inches) the controlled spiral of the more philosophically-oriented works is blown apart. The background is an active pale gray with kinetic brushwork and hints of other colors. An all-directions chaotic texture enhances the energetic vibe. Rune-like black lines that cross each other and form triangular shapes are regularly arranged across the background, a suggestion of text with the feeling of barbed wire. The main focus is on rectangles (of saturated red splotted with vivid orange) with precise corners and the proportions of box-cars, loosely arranged around a center point. They are disconnected from each other and seem to float on the rhythm established by the other elements.

Each of the collections – photography and painting – are cohesive within themselves and tell their own story. In fact, either one could be a successful gallery show on its own. The juxtaposition of the two adds more dimension to the visitor’s impression of the artist, who is clearly talented in both media. The show is approachable and interesting, and while the titles and descriptions tend to be tremendously literal, the depth of the work, especially the paintings, stands on its own.

Homewood Studios is owned by George Roberts, a retired teacher who has lived and worked in North Minneapolis for over 30 years, and has become a neighborhood gathering place for artists and interested community members. Dedicated to new and young artists who may be staging their first gallery shows, the gallery charges no commission to artists and rents studio space to eight other artists. Visitors to the gallery will discover an unpretentious, friendly environment and a bonus hallway gallery in the back, where the resident artists and George Roberts (who is also a poet, book artist and printmaker) have their works on display. 🕒



***MILES DAVIS’ IMPROVISATION* by Dan Tran, oil on chipboard, about 48x36 inches**