Looking back over my career in the arts, I find that at times I have been guilty of ignoring the role of sensibility in art, for making such a fuss over art that resolves contradictions and restores equanimity, and for paying so little attention to art that enriches and enchants by virtue of its simple vibrance, its wholehearted “goodness” and quality.

It’s all very fine to discuss the virtues of artists whose work represents great moral and formal battles fought and won, but how about those creators whose art represents exquisiteness of sensibility, whose paintings give form and substance not to human resolutions and victories, but to human refinements and sensitivities. Why see art so exclusively in terms of grandeur and monumentality, when it can also be found in a sketch of a flower, in the flash of a firefly, or in the movement of goldfish in murky water?

Art, to most of us, does denote a victory of sorts. And I think this is particularly true of us Americans for whom beauty without pain or guilt seems a little frivolous – unworthy of our pilgrim forefathers. Art does have the right to exist unencumbered of life, to sing like a meadow lark, or to twinkle like a star.

The only problem is that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between something that is charming and pretty and something that is beautiful and truly artistic. Simply put, beauty reveres life and makes us aware of and grateful for it, while the merely pretty teases and promises, but provides us with nothing other than itself.

In the preparation of this exhibition, I have been fortunate to have received the generous help of many people. Foremost among those to whom I owe a debt of gratitude is artist Natvar Bhavsar and his wife Janet. Mr. Bhavsar has contributed to this show not only his creations, but also something far more precious and irreplaceable – his time.

The following donors and businesses merit special appreciation for their support of this presentation and their commitment to this year’s exhibition schedule: The Estate of Charles Almand, Dennis Aylward, Dr. Bruce Bigman and Carolyn Bigman, Samuel and Donna Blatt, Bill and Terri Booth, Earl and Patti Colvard, Sal Cristofano and Laura Gosper, Manny De La Vega, Dr. Wayne Dickson and Jewel Dickson, Robert Dorian and Linda Colvard Dorian, Lee and Susan Downer, Timothy Eaton, LaVerda Felton, Dr. Deborah and Lee Goldring, Christie G. Harris, John and Karen Horn, Ed Jackson and Pat Heller-Jackson, Betty Drees Johnson, Ray and Betty Johnson, Barney and Linda Lane, Tim and Mary Jeanne Ludwig, Van and Frances Massey, Walter and Robin May, Beth and Greg Milliken, Linda Pinto, Dagny and Tommy Robertson, Stephen and Claudia Roth, Patricia Schwarze, Fred and Jeanne Staloff, Harry Sugarman, Judith Thompson, Dr. Ian Williams and Dr. Nancy Hutson, Dr. John Wilton and Nancy Wilton, Dorothy M. Gillespie Foundation, Daytona Auto Mall, DeLand Breakfast Rotary, DeLand Fall Festival of the Arts, DeLand Rotary Club, Inc., Boulevard Tire Center, Collaborative WEALTH, E.O. Painter Printing Company, Faith Hope & Charity, Krewe Nouveau, Fleishel Financial Associates, Lane Insurance, Inc., Lacey Family Charitable Trust, Mainstreet Community Bank, Massey Services, Inc., Museum Guild, Publix Supermarket Charities, United Parachute Technologies, West Volusia Beacon, W. W. Gay Mechanical Contractor, Inc., State of Florida Division of Cultural Affairs and the County of Volusia.

Finally, I would like to recognize our Museum’s Board of Trustees, led by President Judy Thompson, for their support in enabling us to realize our ambitious exhibition program, and to praise my Staff who provided indispensable assistance in research, public relations and curatorial tasks.

George S. Bolge,  
Chief Executive Officer  
Museum of Art - DeLand, Florida

Natvar Bhavsar: The Dimension of Color

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The only problem is that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between something that is charming and pretty and something that is beautiful and truly artistic. Simply put, beauty reveres life and makes us aware of and grateful for it, while the merely pretty teases and promises, but provides us with nothing other than itself.
One contemporary artist who is well aware of this distinction is Natvar Bhavsar, who has spent a considerable portion of his creative life bringing it into sharp focus through paintings and prints that are subtle evocations of the gentler, more ineffable levels and dimensions of our physical and spiritual universe.

He has done so at considerable risk, for there is nothing as difficult or dangerous as the pursuit of beauty in art. It is as elusive as the proverbial bluebird of happiness, and just as difficult to pin down.

Bhavsar has succeeded where so many have failed because he has had the innate good sense to approach beauty as though it were a lovely butterfly awaiting transportation to a special and mysterious garden rather than as the same butterfly destined to be mounted on a board. By that I mean that through his unique method of working he coaxes and cajoles his colors, shapes, textures and lines toward their final destinations on his canvas, and doesn’t push and pull them about as though they were puppets on his string. He evokes the qualities and dimensions of feelings he wants to communicate and share, and thus he is as much magician as artist, as much planter as harvester.

His art is the result of a loving and shrewd reading not only of life and of the Old Masters, but of modernism as well, and it lies in direct linear descent from the art of Monet, Bonnard and Klee.

Although he has produced a variety of other works, I am particularly enchanted by his very large amorphic paintings into which we are drawn, much as the huge landscape canvases of the 19th century transported us into untamed forests, spectacular mountain vistas, or vast, empty plains. Only here, we enter an abstract, coloristic and textural universe in which we journey between and among an extraordinary variety of delicate textures, flat areas of color, fine gradation of hot reds or deep, cool blues, energetic linear squiggles that move in and out like friendly fish, irregular blobs, circles, squares, and triangles. While, overall, is a deeply luminous, multidimensional atmosphere both ocean-deep and sky-clear all wrapped up and transcended by a vision of art that is beautifully evocative, lyrical, exhilarating, and absolutely his own – a vision that has produced an art that suggests music, long walks through magical gardens or deep, underwater landscapes.

Bhavsar, in other words, is not a formal purist, a designer and architect of abstract compositions intended to stand strictly on their own without any reference to other things, places or events. He is a visual poet whose apparently abstract images actually exist to enchant us with intimations and evocations of things we can sense but never quite see.

To think that his work is merely pleasant and pretty, but not much else is an easy trap to fall into with this artist. And the situation is not made any easier by the fact that his paintings are so accessible, so easy to respond to. One needs very little art-historical (ancient or recent) information to be caught up by his work, and certainly no complex explanation of its intent or purpose to enjoy it. It quite simply is, and we need only take that first responsive step toward it. After that, the work itself takes over.

After a century of assuming that all art worthy of the name must first be difficult if not almost impossible to grasp, and that any art that is lovely and appealing at first glance must be superficial and trite, we are now hard put to know what to do with art that gently beckons us toward it rather than dares us to understand what it is all about. If one were to spend some time with Bhavsar’s mural-size canvases, one would begin to sense that a great deal more was going on in them than one had first thought.

Natvar Bhavsar has painted a number of the loveliest paintings produced in recent years, but I did not know that until I let my feelings and my heart – not my head – lead me to that realization. And in the process, I learned more than ever that there is indeed a great deal more to art than monumentality or grandeur or verisimilitude, that beauty is a matter of sensibility as much as of formal resolution. And that it can be warm and friendly as well as cool and austere.

G.S.B.
Indian-born Natvar Bhavsar (1934 - ) is often compared with abstract expressionists and Color Field painters like Mark Rothko, but Bhavsar’s method of building up surfaces through layers of dry pigment is uniquely his own. Although inspired by India’s ancient aesthetics, by his grandmother’s work with colorful textiles, by Sanskrit literature (the sacred language of Hinduism) and by the subcontinental seasons, Bhavsar’s approach is modern American.

In the early 1960s, Bhavsar left India, earned his Master of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania, and then settled in New York City. He received the prestigious John D. Rockefeller Grant in 1965, and later the Guggenheim Fellowship. Bhavsar’s body of work appears in more than 800 public and private collections around the world. He is an artist, an educator and activist in many areas of public life and world economics.