

Dave Tourje dabbles in a surrealistic realm

Dave Tourje lives in color.

That might not seem too unusual. Most humans — along with most other primates, bunches of birds and lots of other creatures out there — have the biological capacity to distinguish different wave lengths of light. But seeing isn't everything.

Tourje, whose work is currently on exhibit at the Riverside Art Museum in "Dream Kitchen," seems to throw himself into the colors of his paintings, giving them a physicality that one does not often see.

ON ART

Devorah L. Knaff

"Dave Tourje: Dream Kitchen"

When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Mondays through Saturdays.
Through Dec. 28.

Where: Riverside Art Museum,
3425 Mission Inn Ave.,
Riverside.

Admission: \$1.

Information: (909) 684-7111.

His large-scale paintings are full of fairly surreal images. Not really peculiar, have-to-ask-yourself-is-this-man-on-drugs peculiar. But definitely full of the kinds of characters that most of us see only in our dreams — or on the street during Halloween week. His paintings seem to be records of complex human interactions. Looking at his pieces is like walking into a room and finding two people dressed in surgical scrubs, one holding a gecko, the other an elaborately warded brass key, both listening to a child read "The Patchwork Girl of Oz." You just know that there's a really good story behind how those three people, not to mention the gecko, came to be in that room to-



Dave Tourje's "The Gypsy Woman Told Him (Things He Didn't Want to Know)" from his "Dream Kitchen" collection at the Riverside Art Museum.

gether. And you'd sort of like to ask how it all came to be. But you'd also like to be able to just make up your own story — in case the real one turned out to be disappointingly mundane.

Tourje's paintings are not narrative in any traditional sense. We haven't, for example, the slightest idea what the man with the guitar is doing in "King and Beast." But we know that whatever he was doing before he paused to be captured in pigment and to look out at us it was something marvelously compelling to him.

One of the philosophical problems of painting since at least the Renaissance has been the question of the relationship between the subject of a painting and the audience for that work. Beginning in the Renaissance, those subjects began more and more often to look directly out of the paintings, inviting us to admire and desire them — or at least this was usually the case when women were depicted — or to admire and respect them, if they were men.

But that fiction — that we are actually looking at a real person who is at that moment looking

back at us — has been challenged since even before the rise of modernism. But what Tourje, and others dabbling in the surrealist realm, has done in turn is to challenge that challenge.

Look here, Tourje seems to be saying, you know and I know that there isn't really a person standing here just on the other side of this canvas. Of course not. But look, there she is, looking back at us.

The paintings in this show somehow convey a sense of a living person and indeed an entire complex world just on the other side of the dividing line of the canvas, a world that we have the chance to view only a single glimpse of, a world that we must recreate through what we can learn with only a single snapshot. And knowing this, Tourje has pressed as much information as he can into that single frame.

That's the effect of looking at a work like Tourje's "The Gypsy Woman Told Him (Things He Didn't Want to Know)" in which the image of a dark woman both seems to fill the canvas and to draw up back into it, into a world

of shifting shapes and melting vistas. His designs are seemingly simple — with broad areas of color, big, geometric spaces, simplified forms. And yet they are also full of small details, curlicues and expressive gestures and subtle shadings, as if he had painted specifically for you to look at them close up and also as if he had painted them to be seen from a great distance.

And then there is all of that magnificent color. Color to drown in. Color so deep and varied that you feel that if you walked too close to the canvases all of that color might transfer itself to you by some sort of osmotic process.

And then perhaps you too might be able to enter into the marvelous worlds of these paintings, and discover what tales the gypsy woman is telling and what songs the man is strumming on his guitar.