

# Cannon Shots: Artist Emilio Lobato looks at Cannon Beach with an artist's eye

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Cannon Beach Gazette

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Is Cannon Beach a getaway or a place to tune in? For many of us it's a little of both.

Emilio Lobato III came to the coast in January from his home in Denver. The painter and his family have returned to Cannon Beach almost every year since their first getaway in 1987. Lobato's wife, Darlene Sisneros, a prominent Denver attorney, died six years ago.

This winter, Emilio Lobato returned alone for an immersive artistic experience. Lobato's work can also be found Wiliam Havu Gallery in Denver and the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland. He has exhibited in Denver's Kirkland Museum, the Denver Art Museum and galleries nationally.

Q: What was it that drew you here?

Lobato: Cannon Beach has always been a good place for hunkering down, cocooning, working on projects. I loaded up my car with supplies and I've been here a month painting.

Q: Why mid-winter?

Lobato: I was a little bit worried about coming to such a small town for an extended period.

I have found that I love it. I absolutely love it. It seems like a place where writers live. It's an incredible place to visit when there's no one around. There have been days I've taken walks and I've got the beach to myself. It feels like it's mine.

Q: Tell me about your paintings.

Lobato: Painting is a misnomer in this case. I'm an abstract painter, but this time I'm doing collages. Collecting antique books, papers, physical materials and gluing them down to a surface.

Q: Like some of Picasso's work?

Lobato: Picasso was famous for taking the daily newspaper and gluing it into his compositions and painting on top of it. His (collages) were political, mine are not. They're very, very personal.

I was trying to think what could I create that would describe this region. And more importantly, my experience with it.

Q: Has it been a productive period?

Lobato: I've finished 16 pieces while I'm here, 24-by-24 inches, all collages. I brought the panels, then scoured the coastline for materials that would speak of this area. I found some beautiful old merchant ledgers in Astoria from the 1800s. I found a big antique map of Tillamook Bay. I love books as art pieces.

Q: How do the collages fit thematically with your paintings?

Lobato: My work is typically a little more dark, geometric, with harder edges. This is much lighter, and playful, hopefully capturing a sense of childhood and nostalgia, a quality in the air, pleasant memories.

Q: How does the coastal environment influence your work?

Lobato: When I'm here the rest of the world disappears. The ocean, I'm finding, is sort of hydrating my soul.

I grew up in such an isolated part of Colorado that the nearest neighbor was half a mile away. So my work of the last 20-plus years has been about isolation and solitude. I've worked that into my themes. That landscape always lent itself to my process: to imagine, to wander, to create, to experiment. The ocean affords me that too.

Q: What do you look for when approaching the canvas?

Lobato: The world doesn't need another painting of the ocean. Don't get me wrong, it's beautiful, but there are plenty that exist. What can I do to bring a different perspective to that experience?

My wife was an avid kite-flyer. She adored stunt kites. She discovered them here. She bought very expensive, super-fast ones, and we traveled with them. She'd bring them here every year, and fly them. She never felt such bliss. One of my inspirations on this trip was to capture that moment.

Q: Describe Cannon Beach from an artist's perspective.

Lobato: There's beauty in everything. The coastline is beautiful. The quality of light is exquisite.

You don't know where the ocean ends and the sky begins. The earth seems to meet the waters.

It's like the edge of the earth. I can't imagine what that looked like to ancient explorers — no wonder they thought they were going to fall off the edge.

Q: Tell me your impressions of Cannon Beach today.

Lobato: I love the mom-and-pop feeling. I love that automobiles are not allowed on the beach.

Cannon Beach is very clean. It's retained that rugged, pristine look.

Q: How are you handling the isolation?

Lobato: This is the most I have talked in three weeks. I'm a somewhat social guy, but I'm surprised how easy it is to shut down.

I think my next step might be a monastery where people don't speak for a week — I wonder if I'm up for the challenge.

Q: When did you feel you made it as an artist?

Lobato: I feel I have arrived as an artist at many times in my career. I've had exhibitions, for example. When you get one of those, it's validation. But you never really quite arrive as an artist. There's always something else to aspire to. I've learned I've been lucky to paint full time for almost 26 years.

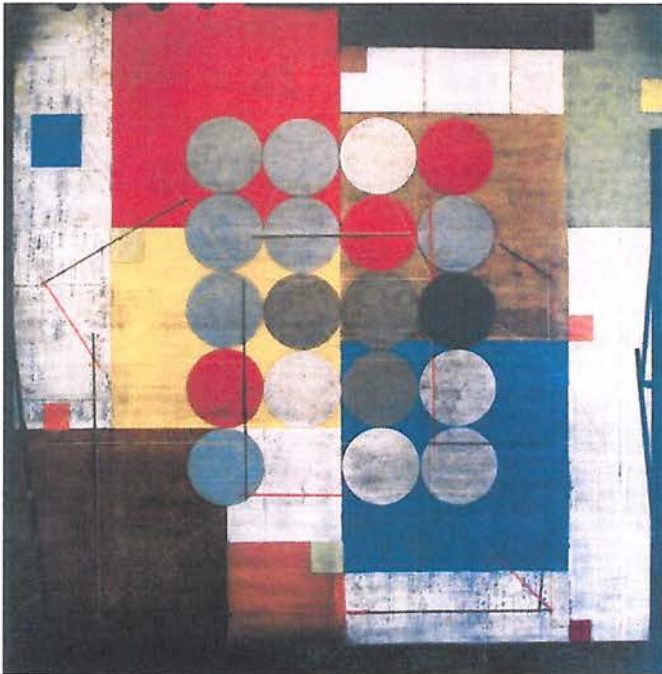
arts and entertainment

# Virtuosity permeates Denver artist Emilio Lobato's mid- career retrospective

By **Kyle MacMillan**  
*Denver Post Fine Arts Critic*

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No work is more closely identified with Lobato than his Black Circle Series, including "Tratando de Recordar (Trying to Remember)," 2008, oil and collage on

panel, 72 inches square. (Courtesy of the artist and William Havu Gallery)

Having grown up in the vast expanses of the San Luis Valley, Emilio Lobato knows isolation — and he both shuns and embraces it.

The theme of solitude, and the Denver artist's mixed feelings surrounding it, permeate "Mi Linda Soledad (My Beautiful Solitude)," a comprehensive 62-piece retrospective devoted to him at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

Unlike many such shows, which sum up a lifetime of achievement, this is a mid-career survey (he was born in 1959) that has the potential to refocus his work and significantly boost his career going forward.

From any point of view, it is a major milestone for Lobato, one only enhanced by the accompanying 88-page catalog and the show's subsequent tour to museums and art centers in Sedona, Ariz.; Ashland, Ore.; and Missoula, Mont.

While it is possible to question the emotional impact of his abstractions, which date in this show from 1993 to the present, it is impossible to deny his uncompromising technical virtuosity.

This prolific Latino artist's work has the sweep and evolutionary narrative to sustain an



exhibition of this scale, with identifiable periods that curator Tariana Navas-Nieves carefully denotes.

Lobato grew up in the village of San Pablo, part of a family that traces its roots in the United States back generations. Even though his father was a middle-school art teacher, Lobato's aspirations to be an artist made him feel like an outcast in his rural surroundings.

After high school, he eagerly fled to Colorado Springs for art studies at Colorado College, where he received first-rate training but also encountered isolation of a different kind: cultural and ethnic discrimination.

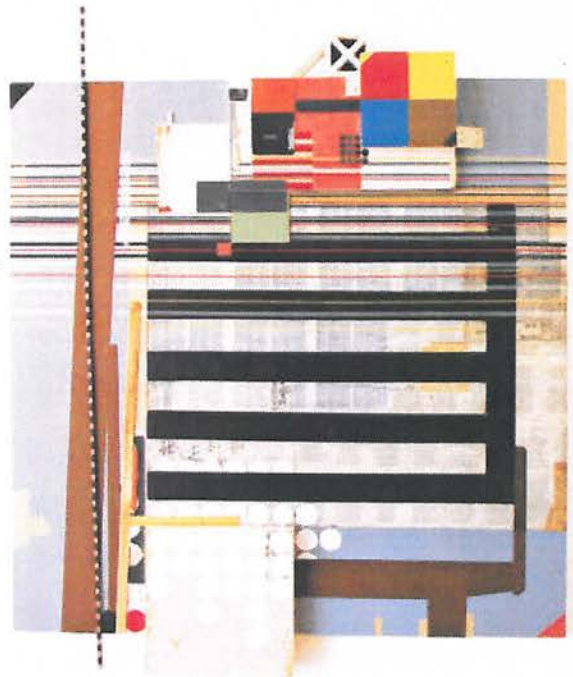
Some of his obviously sharp feelings at the time can be seen in three dark, loosely expressionist drawings from his 1982 senior exhibition, one based on a newspaper account of two pickled heads found in northern New Mexico.

But for reasons that are unclear, Lobato set aside the rawness and freedom that suffuse these works and turned to more contained abstractions, the earliest of which in the show date to 1993 — just after his decision to make art his full-time pursuit.

There is little especially original about these early abstract paintings, when he was still finding his way stylistically. But they show that, even from the outset, he possessed a strong sense of composition, texture and line.

The first inklings of the characteristic look that we now associate with Lobato came in 1996 with selections like "Vara (Measuring Stick)" and "Ceniza (Ash)." They incorporate what would become recurring elements in his work — collaged book pages, blocks of unmodulated black and

a geometric sensibility.



Lobato's new mixed-media assemblages, such as "La Medida de un Hombre (The Measure of a Man)," 72 by 60 inches, are the most boisterous, freewheeling works of his career. (Provided by William Havu Gallery )

But it is not until 1998 that a sustained series emerges that is unmistakably his — what Navas-Nieves labels refined abstraction. Its principal defining quality are abstracted motifs shown in silhouette, kind of like a shadow-puppet show.

But his most prototypical works (one is on the cover of the catalog) make up his Black Circle Series (2005-07). Groups of circles are imposed on multilayered backgrounds composed of inexact grids and loose outlines of three-dimensional structures.

Each painting contains one black circle, which, Navas- Nieves writes, symbolizes the artist as a "solitary man, aware of feeling apart from everyone and different from society."

She describes "Sandia (Watermelon)" (2005) as a work of great intensity, writing that the pervasive red suggests a pool of blood symbolizing the artist's deep pain.

But few of the profound emotions she finds in this work registered with me. Indeed, it crystallizes my nagging questions about the emotional impact of Lobato's work.

Without Navas-Nieves' description, I would see only a hushed, handsomely toned painting with one bold black circle — a satisfying, resonant-enough composition but little more.

Here and in many of Lobato's pieces, that emotional intensity appears to me to be lost in the unwaveringly manicured, polished rigor and symmetry that he insists on in every work.

Certainly, artists such as Jan Vermeer have proved that paintings can have such ultra-finished qualities and still deliver an emotional punch.

And closer to our time, Robert Motherwell, one of Lobato's inspirations, has convincingly demonstrated the emotional power of abstraction. In his famous Elegy to the Spanish Republic series, Motherwell deploys black forms and red slivers to bold, haunting effect.

Much of the feeling I find missing in the Black Circle Series pops up in his lesser-known Cuba Series (1998- 2004) as well as two groups of

work that Lobato has never exhibited before.

One is his Figurative Series (1994), which consist of thickly painted monolithic figures floating on open, shadowy backgrounds of loose shading and flowing drips. Nieves-Navas links them to African masks and shields, which Lobato collects, but it also is possible to relate them to some of the haunting abstracted figures of Fritz Scholder.

Even more jarring are three examples from his Organic Series (1995), which are like nothing else in his output. These works, such as the creepy if nimbly rendered "Avispa (Wasp)," are inspired by nests, cocoons and insects.

As he did in those series, Lobato has given himself more expressive latitude in "Casi, Casi (Bit by Bit)," an exhibition of 31 recent works running through April 9 at the William Hawu Gallery, the artist's longtime Colorado dealer.

In this body of work, the artist has liberated himself from his self-imposed exigency to work within a defined series and instead seems to pursue an array of directions at once, drawing on many of the previous bodies of work on view in Colorado Springs.

Especially promising are a new group of pieces, such as "La Torre de Babel (The Tower of Babel),"



that take his paintings into the realm of assemblage. These multicomponent, multicolor works, which incorporate scraps of cardboard and found objects such as pencils and yardsticks, are among the most boisterous, freewheeling works of his career.

With a mid-career retrospective under his belt and this latest group of works pointing him in new creative directions, it will be fascinating to see what lies ahead for Lobato, whose best work might still be ahead of him.

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## **Denver artist Emilio Lobato on display**

"mi linda soledad (my beautiful solitude)"  
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 30 W. Dale St.,  
Colorado Springs. Curator Tariana Navas-Nieves  
has organized a mid-career retrospective of the  
Denver artist. It includes 62 of his paintings,  
drawings and original prints from all his major  
series. Through May 15. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Tuesdays through Sundays. \$10, \$8.50 seniors,  
students and military personnel, and free for  
members and children 4 and younger. 719-634-  
5581 or [csfineartscenter.org](http://csfineartscenter.org)

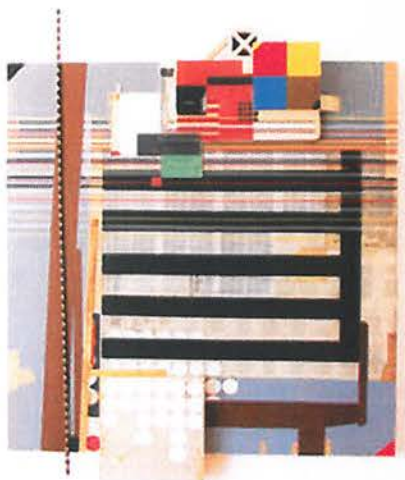
"casi, casi (bit by bit)" William Havu Gallery, 1040  
Cherokee St. Thirty-one of Lobato's latest works  
are on view in this multifaceted solo exhibition.  
Through April 9. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays  
through Fridays and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays.  
Free. 303-893-2360 or [williamhavugallery.com](http://williamhavugallery.com)



# Mi Linda Soledad and Casi Casi make up a stunning double dose from Emilio Lobato

AACommentsBy [Michael Paglia](#) Tuesday, Mar 22 2011

This year has started with a bang for those of us who are fascinated by the visual arts culture in Colorado. In January, RedLine unveiled a wholehearted salute to [Dale Chisman](#), a master in the field of abstract painting here during the last three decades.



"La Medida de un Hombre/The Measure of a Man," by Emilio Lobato, mixed media.

## Details

Through May 15, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 30 West Dale Street, Colorado Springs, 719-634-5581, [www.csfineartscenter.org](http://www.csfineartscenter.org). Through April 9, William Havu Gallery, 1040 Cherokee Street, 303-893-2360, [www.williamhavugallery.com](http://www.williamhavugallery.com).

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With that show, one of the best things I've ever seen in Denver, RedLine proved that it could attract a who's-who art crowd for an opening. But even more important, it showed that it could host a feature that produced heavy visitor traffic for the entirety of a run. This is something that only rarely has happened at RedLine.

Now there's a worthy heir to the mantle of greatness seen at the Chisman show: ***Mi Linda Soledad***, which means "My Beautiful Solitude," the [Emilio Lobato](#) retrospective at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

To my mind, there are many connections between Lobato and Chisman, and they go beyond the fact that both Colorado natives worked in abstract painting in the late 20th and early 21st centuries and displayed their work principally in Denver and [Santa Fe](#). To me, their most profound interconnection is in their training as artists, with both having studied at Colorado College — admittedly decades apart — with the late [Mary Chenoweth](#). Her influence is easy to see in their shared use of collage and of geometrically conceived compositions that also feature expressionist elements.

Lobato was born in the town of [San Pablo](#) in the [San Luis Valley](#) in 1959, where his family had lived for centuries. They were a part of the Hispanic and Roman Catholic culture that has flourished there, and the artist's early experiences — in particular, his exposure to the Penitente Brotherhood, whose members reenacted the Stations of the Cross with a *Passion of the Christ*-style taste for gore and violence — left a lasting impression on him.

Though his grandfather had been a weaver, Lobato felt that his taste for art made him an outcast. The reference to loneliness in the retrospective's title, and in many of the titles of individual works in the show, reflect a difficult childhood. At the age of nineteen, he moved to Colorado Springs to attend CC, where he found Chenoweth and another key mentor, sculptor [Carl Reed](#). After graduation in 1982, Lobato moved to [Ann Arbor](#), Michigan, where his future wife, [Darlene Sisneros](#), attended law school. The two married in 1984 and settled in Denver.

The CSFAC retrospective is installed in a set of galleries on the second floor, just off the connecting atrium that joins the landmark [John Gaw](#) Meem-designed building to the expertly conceived addition by [David Tryba](#). The show was put together by Tariana Navas-Nieves, curator of Hispanic and Native American Art at the institution. It's perhaps because of this specialty that she set up an initial section devoted to setting the context of Lobato's life, as she would do in the case of a historical subject. There are photo enlargements, one depicting Lobato as a little boy in the San Luis Valley and a couple that reveal his eccentrically luxurious studio here in Denver. There are also examples of pottery and tribal art, as well as a print by [Robert Motherwell](#) and another by Chenoweth, all of which are intended to represent Lobato's aesthetic ancestors.

There are also early works by Lobato in this context area; one of the genuine standouts is "Por Mi Gran Culpa/Through My Most Grievous Fault," from 1982. In this painting, Lobato neatly links his Hispano-

Catholic heritage to international abstraction, using the Christian cross as the key formal device to connect the two. On a blank ground of bare paper, Lobato has placed a black cross accented by two ovals on either side of it — Christ's pierced hands? — and spare spatters of blood-red paint surrounding it.

On the opposite wall are paintings that start off the chronology of Lobato's career beginning in the early '90s. In some, as with the cross painting, Lobato reveals his early interest in minimalist ideas. I loved the small but impressive "Nací Triste/I Was Born Sad," wherein a red panel with scribbles on it is attached to a smaller panel that is predominantly black.

Nearby are some good-looking color-field paintings from the "Herida/Wound" series from 1993; they have light grounds and dark slash marks. Next to those are three stunning collage paintings from 1994 that build on the earlier works but came out completely different. They were a real revelation to me, because I'd never seen anything like them before. In these, Lobato has created arrangements of simple shapes and lines that are clustered in the center of light-colored drippy grounds.

The exhibit continues around the corner, past several eye-dazzlers, and arrives in the large-ish gallery that provides an anteroom to the Seagraves Gallery. This is the start of the sections displaying Lobato's best-known works — those from the late '90s through recent years. In many, Lobato placed ripped-out pages from old books across the surface of his pictures, creating grids that have been laid on black grounds. On top of the book-page grids, he put silhouettes of simple shapes that are also in black. These pieces were done in 1998, and I'd seen them before, but I'd never realized how much they responded to the sensibility of his former teacher Reed.