



Sister Joanne Emmer and her acrylic wash painting, "Down in the Iris." PHOTO BY BRAD STAUFFER

## Joanne of art: A life's work on canvas

BY BILL STIEGER

Sister Joanne Emmer, a retired art teacher at the College of St. Catherine and St. Mary's Junior College, recalls how, as a young girl living in Minneapolis during the Great Depression, her mother refused to give her good drawing paper until she could "draw something nice." Emmer accepted the challenge, again and again, and this April the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet will present a retrospective of her paintings at the Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Ave.

Following high school, Emmer attended the Walker Art School and then joined the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. She received bachelor's and master's degrees in art from the College of St. Catherine and the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, respectively. She then taught art and theology for 10 years at St. Catherine, before moving on to St. Mary's Junior College in Minneapolis, where for three decades she taught art to women, many

of whom were preparing to work in the medical profession.

"I became a member of a Catholic religious order that was historically committed to both education and hospital work," Emmer said. "It made it possible for me to become both a teacher and an artist."

Emmer's early paintings were oil on canvas. She also became a skilled printmaker, using both silk screen and wood cuts. Then in the late 1980s, she began to explore the techniques of acrylic wash painting.

Wash painting is executed on a horizontal canvas. The artist wets the canvas, drains off the water and lets the canvas dry until damp. A color wash is then applied.

"You can pour it, spatter it, tilt the canvas around to create shapes," Emmer said. "The important thing is to get one color down so that it begins to make suggestions about what to do next."

Emmer used the acrylic wash technique to create her Jubilee Series in 1999 in preparation for the jubilee

year of 2000 declared by Pope John Paul II and to help mark the 150th anniversary of the Sisters of St. Joseph in 2001. "I wanted to ponder the great jubilee themes of our spiritual forebears as preserved in the Hebrew Book of Leviticus, the Christian Scriptures and the community lore on which (the Sisters of St. Joseph's) celebration would be based," she said.

The paintings in Emmer's Earth Series are among the upcoming exhibit's most recent works. Using acrylic wash, Emmer rendered Twin Cities area landscapes between 2002 and 2006. The wash technique created hauntingly beautiful, dream-like effects.

The Emmer retrospective will open with a public reception from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, April 3, at the Carondelet Center. The exhibit will remain on view through April. Limited edition prints of Emmer's Earth Series will also be for sale as a benefit for the Sisters of St. Joseph's charities.

For more information and viewing hours, call 651-690-7026.