

Erie painter Rebecca Tolle captures the features of Erie's landscape in her 'Trailings' collection

By Doug Pike Colorado Hometown Weekly

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The work of Erie artist Rebecca Tolle graced the walls of Creative Framing's gallery in downtown Louisville Friday, March 2. Tolle's paintings depict scenes from Erie's landscape, past and present. (Doug Pike/Colorado Hometown Weekly)

Erie artist Rebecca Tolle is hoping to open her neighbors' eyes, whether they're driving through town or viewing her paintings in a Louisville gallery.

Tolle's collection "Trailings ... things left behind" opened Friday, March 2, for a two-month stint at Louisville's Creative Framing Gallery, 916 Main St. in Louisville. The collection features views of Erie's landscape not typically captured artistically, providing what Louisville Art Association president Barbara McGehan said is a fresh take on the region.

"Her paintings are unusual in the sense that she's not only painting the typical subjects that painters paint, but has done a series of paintings ... which features paintings of the Erie landfill, oil derricks, and other things left behind in our modern era, which contrasts with the beauty of the Colorado mountains and landscape," McGehan said. Tolle said her art was meant to carry a message.

"I'm a little bit of an art activist at heart. I grew up in the 60s and 70s," Tolle said. "I noticed these oil derricks going up by the landfill. One would close and another went up. I thought

about the vistas from out here and started wondering, are we really noticing or are we just driving by?"

During the show's opening Friday, few visitors to the gallery passed by Tolle's works without giving them a closer look. Tolle's oil drip technique forces the viewer to look deeper into the image.

"My paintings aren't ugly, they make these things look pretty and they make people look closer," said Tolle, 58, who needed to show her work as part of her Masters in art requirement at Regis University.

The Trailings collection includes titles such as "Night Oil," "Rig Lights," "Dark Under Ground," "Windblown," "Longs Peak in Blue," "Scene from Highway 5," "Colorado Unabridged," and "Seagulls in Erie," depicting the views in and around Tolle's Vista Ridge neighborhood.

All demand an inquisitive eye, and many often get mistaken for more traditionally scenic locales. For example, "Seagulls in Erie" often gets mistaken for a seascape, Tolle said.

"You have these seagulls that are being scattered because of the big trucks that are dumping the trash. You've got trash flying, seagulls flying, you've got the equipment flattening it down," Tolle said. "At first, people think it's a day at the beach. It kind of proves my point that people need to look closer."

And not just at her paintings.

With Erie currently at the center of the local debate regarding hydraulic fracking, Tolle's art is more poignant than ever. "Erie has Erie Rising (an activist group attempting to halt hydraulic fracking near homes and schools in Erie) now, and while I hate to focus on the fracking and air quality, I do want to start a dialog," Tolle said. "I think we need to really deeply look at it. They're doing quality checks on the air now. But we didn't do baseline water samples and we don't know what's happening under the ground. (My art is) about getting people to see what we're not taking care of when it comes to the land. It's beautiful out here in Colorado and we want to keep it that way. Sometimes we're after the wrong things." But Tolle's not pointing fingers.

"I think we're all at fault. I think most towns are this way," she said. "For me, these scenes were impactful. I could go so many different ways with this."