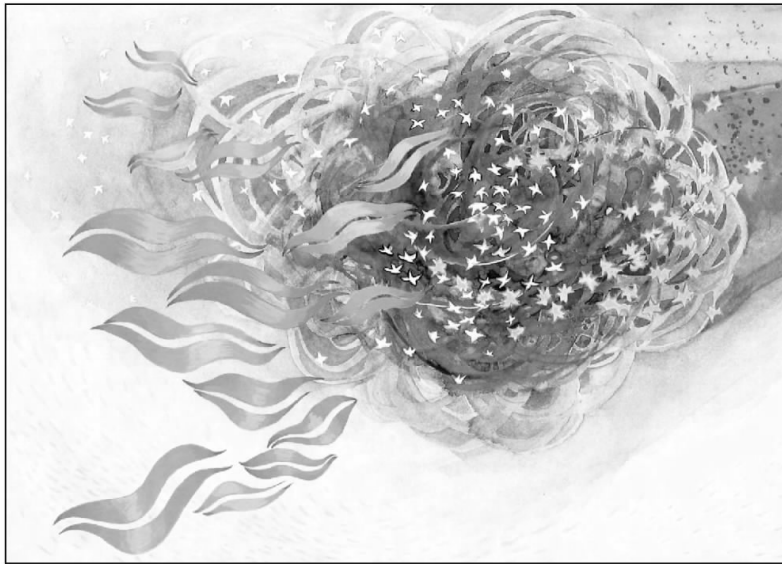


Art

Her abstracts are full of life



Susan Ziegler's "Astral Body" is part of her exhibition at the Gross McCleaf Gallery.

By Edward J. Sozanski
INQUIRER ART CRITIC

For artists such as Susan Ziegler, nature remains the ultimate role model. However, Ziegler doesn't merely describe or imitate nature; she achieves something far more difficult.

Using a personal abstract language inspired by observation and sensation, she creates analogs, fantastical paintings that communicate knowledge of natural forms and phenomena and pulse with life without attempting to mimic reality.

Ziegler's paintings on display at the Gross McCleaf Gallery explode with vitality generated by light, color and movement. The painted energy looks and feels perfectly natural even though the artist's imagination supplies the generating mechanism.

Ziegler does use shapes that suggest familiar organisms, particularly whole flowers and petals. Besides these, she deploys swarms of winged objects that might be butterflies, a yellow-and-purple "spiderweb," and leafy aggregations that look like mosaics.

Several paintings feature bright yellow effusions; they could be taken for suns, but one is more inclined to consider them balls of pure energy.

Besides the swirling, fluttering movement in most paintings — oils and acrylics, along with some gouaches — Ziegler sets up forceful visual tensions by, for instance, combining sharp detail with fuzzy color fields. Hues are punched up to maximum vividness, and even negative spaces become emotionally charged.

Without using a single literal quote, Ziegler extols the complex glories of nature so effectively that one's spirits lift — at least until one goes back outdoors into the smothering tropical heat.

Gross McCleaf, 127 S. 16th St.
10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays.
Through Aug. 19. 215-665-8138 or
www.grossmccleaf.com.

Gallery Siano, 309 Arch St.
11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursdays
through Saturdays. Through
Aug. 20. 215-629-2940.

Glories of wax

"Oil + Wax" at Gallery Siano, ostensibly about encaustic painting, is more a modest survey of how some contemporary artists use hot wax, in two- and three-dimensional works.

Traditional encaustic technique involves mixing pigments with hot wax. Not all the 17 artists in this show adhere strictly to that method. Some simply coat their surfaces with wax, a way of modulating texture, reflectivity and color.

Looking at the various applications, one wonders what the wax contributes in individual cases. Some artists emphasize waxy character — in Howard Hersh's abstractions, thick layers create color shifts.

Others, particularly Michelle Marcuse and Dale Roberts, favor a more restrained approach that does not shout "wax." In Roberts' realist oils, the wax softens edges but doesn't intrude. In a similar way, Marcuse creates delicate, soft textures in her abstractions.

Artist Alan Soffer, who organized the show, included several artists who use wax sculpturally. Kim Bernard's works are especially nice, particularly the cluster of sliced black pods called *Up-rooted*.