Organic growth supplies the patterns in student art exhibit

REGINA VALLUZZI
Gerald McCarty
Paintings and drawings.
Winner Student Art Gallery.
Closing party today.

By MARK ROBERTS

The two artists whose work is on display in the Student Center share an interest in organic growth as a source of patterns. In the paintings and drawings of Gerald McCarty '89, which are built around crystalline constructions, this interest is made explicit; in the statement that accompanies the exhibition he states that the "organic impulse for growth" lies at the source of his inspiration.

The intention of the abstraction Regina Valluzzi's eight practices is to focus attention on the work itself, allowing "the work of art to become its own subject" and "function as a door into itself." Familiar objects are glimpsed, but the process of creation is clearly paramount, building the pictures in a series of steps that are as relentless as the growth of a crystal or micro-organism, yet capable of producing vital and original designs.

Valluzzi works in a variety of drawing media. Three dark, medium-sized works in charcoal, Labyrinth and two untitled works, immediately catch the eye. There are gentle areas of color but shades of grey are predominant. The overlapping areas are built up like scales: the charcoal is used to effectively sculpt the forms. What gives life are the flecks of detail — pebbles on a beach one seems to see, or a glittering eye peering through a chink in this organic dream wall. The pictures suggest the brooding thoughts that billow around the subconscious. The emotional content of Valluzzi's work is expressed in her statement that they are largely based upon, and intended to convey, mood.

The same meticulous accumulation of abstract detail is seen in the series of miniature pen and ink drawings on paper that accompany the larger works. These are most successful when most abstract; those that incorporate complete objects appear rather hackneyed, a little too like the doo-dos one does in the margin of a school book to stand individual scrutiny. Eyes, faces and hands have not been closely observed enough to work as representation, but their presence constrains the spectator's response.

Although a tracery of fine lines holds together many of her pictures, Valluzzi is adept at the discreet use of color in several more charcoal drawings, including a tactile, rich still life. There are also two essays in oil, which appear rather different from most of the drawings. Our Town is again dreamy, but otherworldly rather than broodingly so. Delicate, tenting houses, painted almost childishly, are reflected in the swirling central pool, vigorously sculpted in paint. Our Town is a suggestive, intriguing picture, superior to the disjointed Sailing that hangs beside it.

McCarty's work is at its best when abstract, as well. Two charcoal drawings of houses that accompany his grand sketch for an installation on the Anchorage coastal trail are uninspired, but some of his experiments with crystals are exciting.

The culmination of the McCarty's crystal interest is represented by three large drawings in ink and charcoal dating from 1988, in which a hexagonal crystal motif is featured in diminishing magnification. All three are composed around a strong line, running lengthwise on a slight diagonal. The largest scale is seen in Crystal Prime, which is the least satisfying of the three because it involves large areas of open color, with which McCarty is less at ease than the tiling effects of a finer detail. Crystal Submerged shows a richer image, and vividly suggests the primordial surges of fire and chemistry that preface life. The last and best of these drawings, Crystal Reef, seems to take this idea further. The fine dividing the picture is hard, and has become horizontal, suggesting a geological crest though which a spawning breed of hexagonal crystals has burst out into a world of looming mountains and elemental forces. Growth is seen as both a physiological and a mystical process and a mystery, an idea which the work of both these artists confirms.

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