

Susan Swartz



Color Gone Wild, acrylic on linen, 36 x 36"



Pearlescent, acrylic on linen, 42 x 42"

THRESHOLD. If there were a single word that situates Susan Swartz's art it may be threshold. Susan Swartz is perhaps herself a threshold between nature and visual representation of nature, between life and its image. She shares this liminal life easily, almost as a muse or a sound board of nature. "There is a passion and a meaning behind what I paint. Every canvas begins with a feeling — I feel before I imagine. Meaning and image come together in each painting. I ask, what does it mean to look at the water when the sky and the water are one? What happens as a gray but colorful mist comes in on the waterlilies and soaks in the soul?"

Listening and viewing closely, her passion becomes a vibration, an energy. In conversation her energy modulates between sensation and intensity, between being that energy and motivating it. "These threshold moments are emotive, but they move from emotion to action to meaning."

This movement from emotion to action in life and painting requires strength. "When I walk through the woods it can be tree after tree. And, then the trees are all bunched up together. Then there's color. The feeling is there when I go out and close my eyes and feel the wind in my face. It's there as I open up. How does that effect the wind and the sky?" There's a lot going on in nature, a lot going on in Susan Swartz. How does it effect her? "Everything is very deep and very emotional. I can come out of my studio completely drained. Enthusiastic and drained or completely drained."

Suffusion with the energy of nature, with the sublime, can be exhausting, but Susan Swartz can take it. She struggled with mercury poisoning and Lyme Disease. Her illness made her stronger. "I had to fight to live. It gave me an inner strength. I wanted my life to mean something, to make sure my family knew I did everything I could to live." Her fierce energy to live is brought to her work. It comes through in the knife strokes of *Color Gone Wild*. It recedes in *Pearlescent*. The vibration in *Summer's Best* moves the eye laterally and vertically while pushing and pulling the figures (water lilies) toward and away.

Still, an irony cannot go unstated. Nature, and the unnatural things introduced to nature, can be deadly. Life in the threshold can be all consuming. Even so, in Susan Swartz's life and work, emotional intensity and immersion in nature is ultimately met by God. "I believe God created nature and gifted it to us. If we don't take care of what God gave us we will lose it. My prayer is when people look at my artwork they understand we must take care of what we have, what brings us meaning, what can inspire all of us."

Susan Swartz doesn't leave all this to a chance encounter with her paintings. She has channeled threshold emotion and meaning into film as well. "I became an activist and now work with individuals and organizations such as Waterkeeper Alliance who promote and protect the health of the environment." She has supported films on Lyme Disease — *Under Our Skin*, on mercury poisoning — *Mercury Rising*, on the needless slaughter of dolphins — *The Cove*. "It is possible to make difference. I almost lost my life, and I want to bear witness to our responsibilities as stewards of this earth. I feel when we are given gifts we need to use them — it comes from my heart."

With her life, her view of nature, her belief and action we may be able to return to simple questions and join her in the midst of her threshold. We too may be able to ask informed, interconnected and deeply relevant questions, as Susan Swartz does: "How does the sun feel in the water? How does the wind feel on your face?"



Summer's Best, acrylic on linen, 30 x 40"