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n a t u r a l   r e v e l a t i o n s

susan swartz  
natural revelations

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natural revelations

*I have found peace among the silver trees,  
Known comfort in the cool kiss of the breeze,  
Heard music in its whisper, and  
Have known most certainly that I was not alone.*

FATHER ANDREW "THE BIRCH COPSE"

## Forward

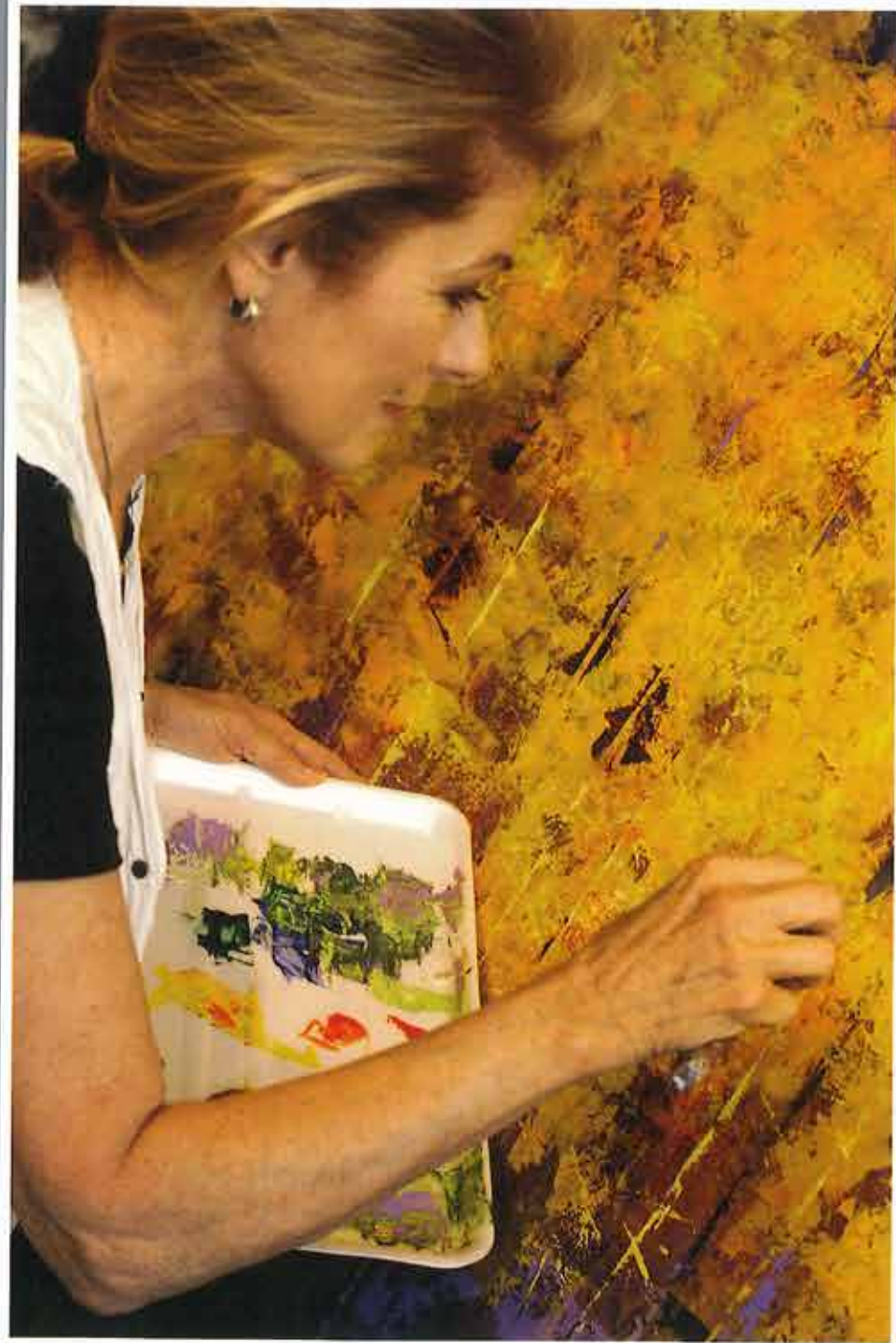
### David Dee, Director, Utah Museum of Fine Arts

On rare occasions, museums have the opportunity to show works of art that demonstrate a talented artist's passion and vision, and that also relate, in a relevant and meaningful way, to important issues of our time. Fortunately for the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA), *Natural Revelations: The Art of Susan Swartz* fits that description. Susan Swartz creates art that expresses her deep love of her craft, of nature, of the spiritual—and inspires us, as viewers, to pause and take stock of our own relationship to the earth, to the divine, and to future generations that will inherit the globe we have inhabited.

While grounded in the real world of nature, Susan Swartz's work also connects us to the pure energy and devotion to color that have characterized abstract art from the mid twentieth century. As all authentic artists, Susan has absorbed many influences and yet based her work in the world that moves her and the issues that concern her. Her commitment to growth as a person and an artist is reflected in the way her style and subject matter have changed over time. Because this show is a rich selection of Susan's dynamic current work, it whets our appetite for future explorations.

The UMFA's rich exhibition and educational programs would not be possible without the generous support of community partners. We thank Zions Bank, the exhibition's Presenting Sponsor, as well as O.C. Tanner, the Willard L. Eccles Charitable Foundation, the S.J. and Jessie E. Quinney Foundation, and the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, who provided additional sponsorship support. who provided additional sponsorship support.

Planning this exhibition has offered us a rewarding chance to work with Laurie Westberg, to whom many thanks are due. Typical of Susan, she graciously agreed to allow us to use the Exhibit's opening reception as a major Gala Fundraiser dedicated to expanding the Museum's exhibition and acquisitions programs. I thank all those who supported this effort and particularly Susan for her encouragement, friendship, and dedication to making the world a better place.



Born in Pittsburgh, Susan Swartz inherited her creative gene from a family of artists and musicians and has been painting for more than 40 years. Since 1998, after raising her family (she has three children and nine grandchildren), she has devoted herself to painting full-time from studios in Park City, Utah and on Martha's Vineyard.

Inspired by the natural world and the intersection of spirituality and art, Swartz paints landscapes and nature scenes that are profoundly abstract. Her distinctive style and artistic excellence have earned her international awards and recognition, and her works are featured in private and corporate collections around the world.

Her paintings are included in the International Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, Salt Lake Olympic Museum, Salt Lake City; and the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame & Museum in Ishpeming, Michigan.

In December 2006, Swartz was published in Gibbs Smith collectors' book *Painters of the Wasatch Mountains*. In 2005, she was honored by Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in recognition of her interaction of artistry with spirituality. She was commissioned to do commemorative artwork for the Salt Lake 2002 Olympic Winter Games and was the recipient of the Mansion Artist of the Year Award by former Utah Governor Michael Leavitt. She has received countless honors and awards from The Garden State Watercolor Society Show, The National Audubon Society, Salmagundi Club of New York, and the Grand National Exhibition of the American Artist Professional League. Her biography appears in *American Artists of Renown*, and she was one of 15 artists invited to exhibit at "Le Salon des Nations" in Paris in the late 1980's.

Swartz is also an active member in her community, supporting programs for social change. She has helped finance the development of numerous films, including the 2005 Oscar-winning documentary *Born into Brothels*, about several unforgettable children who live in the red-light district of Calcutta, and is involved in many other social and environmental endeavors, including supporting projects in Park City and Martha's Vineyard for low-income and diverse populations.

Swartz is represented in Park City, Utah, by Phoenix Gallery; at the Elliott Yeary Gallery in Aspen, Colorado; by the Gardner Colby Gallery in Naples, Florida; and on Martha's Vineyard by the Carol Craven Gallery in Vineyard Haven, where she was featured in a solo show in July 2007. Her work was also shown as part of a group exhibition at the Museum of Utah Art and History in January 2007. Another solo exhibition of her work is currently presented at the Elliott Yeary Gallery in Aspen and her new solo show, "Natural Revelations," will be featured at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in Salt Lake City, January through April 2008.

Swartz is a member of the board of the Salt Lake Film Center, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco/de Young and Legion of Honor. In addition, Susan is on the Dean's Advisory Council of the Harvard Divinity School.

For exhibitions, galleries and affiliations, log on to [www.susanswartz.com](http://www.susanswartz.com).

## A Personal Essay: Susan Swartz

It is a great honor to know a beautiful woman—It is a great honor to know a woman whose exterior beauty matches the beauty of her soul. Susan Swartz won many awards for her paintings when she was a young wife without children. It is an honor to know someone who strove to be a professional artist, but gave up that dream to focus on raising her children. (She would paint long into the morning hours after the children were in bed.) When the children were gone, she turned her full attention to her passion: painting to celebrate what is most important in her life—the beauty of nature.

Susan's art is representative of a long-standing tradition in American Art, which is to depict the American Sublime. Indeed, the goal that she shares with nineteenth-century artists Albert Bierstadt, Jasper Francis Cropsey, Thomas Moran, and the contemporary artist, Clyde Aspevig is the desire to contemplate and to represent the divine beauty of the landscape as God's gift to humanity— that we may treasure its absolute and incomparable beauty.

Whenever I look at one of Susan's paintings, I see the exuberance of the American landscape, the American dream... "Light breaks down where no sun shines," or so said Dylan Thomas. Susan's paintings are that light.

Susan's inner peace transcends her art—when I contemplate a piece, I am captivated and mystified—peaceful. To perceive her paintings, is to be imbued with the sublime. I have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and Susan is dyslexic, so perhaps it is the trial of dealing with the world that gives her the perspective that enables her to depict God's greatness on canvas. Who knows these answers?

Susan began her career as a realist. She sought to depict the light on the waters— the glory of the freshly fallen snow. She realized that the artist did not have to be original; the artist had only to interpret the beauty around her. Thus, she began her odyssey to contemplate, interpret, and depict the beauty of God's world, which daily envelops us. Recently, Susan has painted more abstractly, but she is still inspired by a voice that comes to her in the night. Her paintings resonate the beauty of that voice, calling for us all to listen. Her paintings represent her journey as an artist and as a Christian. They epitomize the road less travelled, but it is a path available to those who love and are illuminated by her paintings.

Charles Newhall

Past Chairman,  
Baltimore Museum of Art

## Toward Nonobjective Abstraction

Essay by Donna L. Poulton, Ph.D.

For the many public and private art collectors acquainted with Susan Swartz's career—and in particular with her popular "Aspen Series"—only a few canvases in this exhibit will be familiar. The large-scale works, *Forest Glow*, *Bronze Sentinels* and the triptych, *Autumn's Bounty*, are reminiscent of her signature work, in that they are dedicated to an interpretive representation of the high desert landscapes that have so inspired her.

In these paintings, the transient treatment of the aspen and the lyrical play of light and space are evocative of woodland scenes that refer beyond the canvas, conjuring the larger settings that comprise these extraordinary colonies. For many collectors these works act as both an exterior and an interior view, tapping into the collective history of our emotional responses to such western alpine settings.

Her large canvas, *Soldier Hollow* (60 x 60 inches), is perhaps Swartz's most widely recognized work. Painted as part of a series of interpretive landscapes for a commission for the 2002 Winter Olympics, the work depicts a cluster of dark willows silhouetted against a deep winter base of snow in the shadow of Mt. Timpanogas. The cool palette saturates the canvas, underscoring at once the bitter cold and beauty of the extraordinary setting. This series is singular in the course of her forty-year career. The work does not fit easily into Swartz's oeuvre, but it does highlight the ease with which she can step out of the range of her genre.

Other paintings such as *Amazing Grace* and *Purple Majesty 2* suggest a transition from objective work toward the appeal of the non-objective. The substance—sky, trees and foreground - is less articulated, but still evident. These paintings are clearly landscapes, but they have also become a conduit for emotional expression through the use of large fields of color. Like many noted artists who work with large canvases, Susan responds to the immediacy and plasticity of acrylic. In *Purple Majesty 2*, she demonstrates a confident use of the bold primary colors—blue and yellow. The color expanse has the emotional push and pull of color applied directly from the tube, but clearly has been shaded. The resulting effect is an amplification of the receding cobalt sky and the aggressive forward reaching yellow trees, creating a jarring, but comfortably familiar scene in the Wasatch in the autumn. *Amazing Grace*, scarcely recognizable as a landscape, has been simplified even further. The discernible has been eliminated and only three planes remain.

In the "Lily Series", *Iridescent Reflections*, *Lilies Unveiled* and *Serenade of Lilies*, there is an urge toward the representational that is partially overcome by a multiplicity of overlapping and subsuming lines that concentrate movement and depth toward the interior. Swartz has replaced the visual perception of classical perspective for depth and layering within the plasticity of the medium itself. The patterns in her "Lily Series" do not take the eye outward, but rather into a repetition of line and plane. There is texture in the strata of color and light; a depth that is captured by the many glazes built upon her canvas.

Swartz has exchanged the challenge of *en plein air* painting for the indomitable work of the imagination: "In my studio I paint from memories and impressions of color, light and feelings, inspired by what I have seen." She observes that she is not "conscious of creating a pattern...I do strive always to draw the eye into the painting...I also do this with layering—my paintings have many layers...ten to fifteen feet away people see one thing and two feet away people see something else."

Swartz's more recent canvases, *After Glow*, *Crimson Reflections*, and *Gentle Morning*, reveal a surprising shift in her interpretative expression of the natural environment. The identifiable landscapes and seascapes that characterized her earlier work are now largely veiled. The underlying veracity is profoundly abstracted, located in a large-scale tumult of color and expression.

The progression of her compositions is toward an unreserved nonobjective abstraction where a work might be derived from the subject but does not replicate it. Although nature always remains her source of inspiration, her work is now essentially freed from objective content; interpretation is evident in more formal terms such as color and texture, and her subjects are now liberated of the line. The expressiveness of Swartz's work is articulated foremost through the dramatic juxtapositions of color. In *After Glow* there are large expanses of warm and cool colors, blues and yellows and split complementarities of yellow: yellow oranges and yellow greens. It is essentially liberated of reference. Only the title *After Glow* remains referential.

In *Crimson Reflections* the paintbrush has usurped the palette knife. The sky is boiling and very painterly. Of her decisions around the palette and fearless use of color, Swartz remarks that she is "inspired by color combinations that I see and constantly push the color contrast in my painting." The painting, *Heaven*, perhaps the most convincing and subjective work in the exhibit, is the culmination of all of the advances that are evident in her earlier work. The currents of warm and cool pigment shifting throughout the canvas are alive. It surges and it recedes. The color harmonies are resonant, profuse and ethereal. It is a study of strength of feeling; an outpouring of the artist's emotional response to the medium and to her inner world.

The range of work reveals the job of a dedicated artist—not to become complacent, but to continue to search for new interpretive medium and content. Susan Swartz is not only conscious of this requirement, but challenges it every day: "I try to grow and experiment and stay fresh...I try to create an emotion, to evoke a feeling in someone else who observes my work, I want him or her to get lost in it and seek something for themselves."

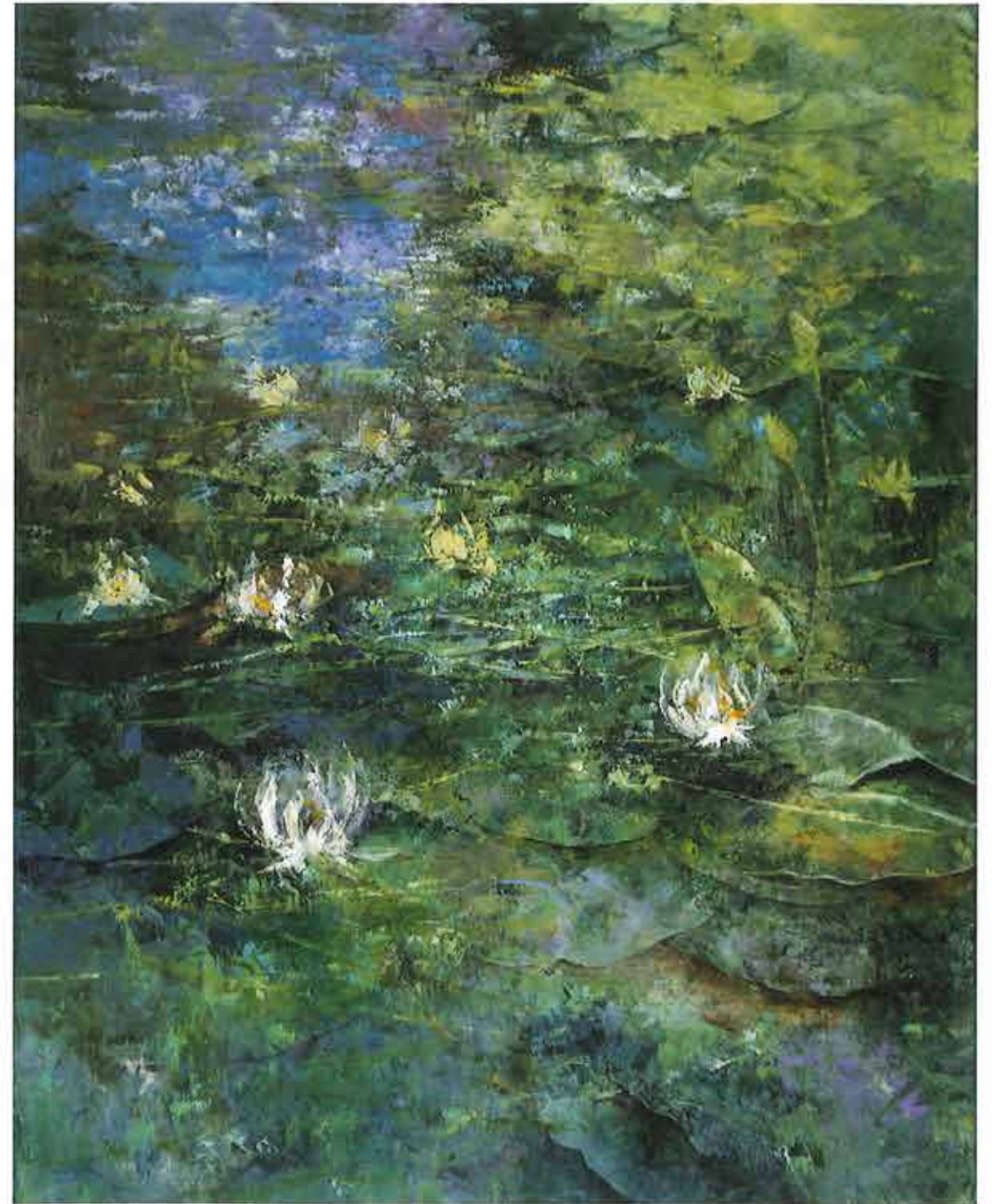
Donna L. Poulton, Ph.D.  
Associate Curator of Art  
Utah and the West, UMFA

*Iridescent Reflections*

Acrylic on Linen

48" x 60"

2006

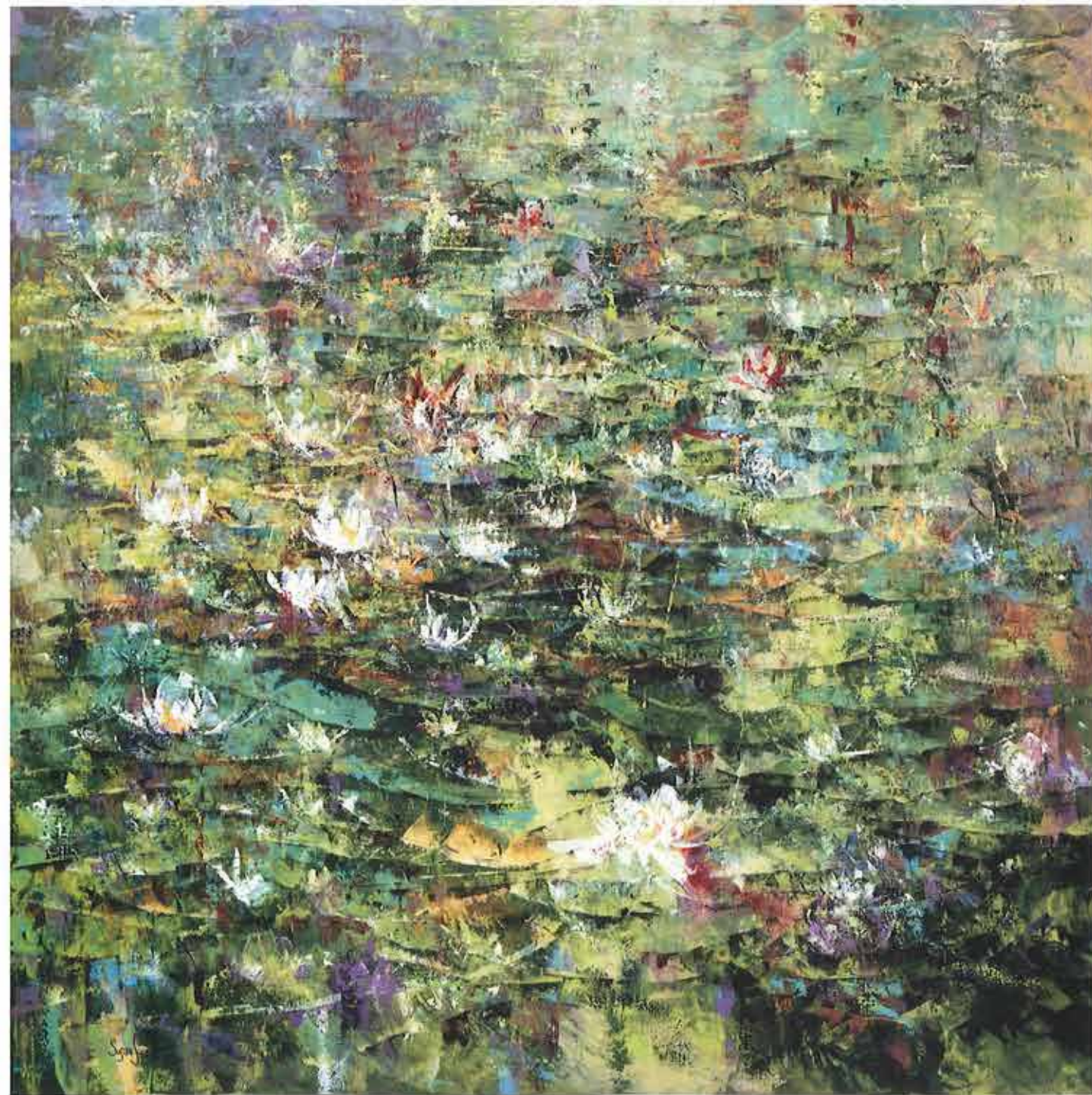


*Serenade of Lillies*

Acrylic on Linen

72" x 72"

2006



*Lilies Unveiled*

Acrylic on Linen

48" x 60"

2007



*Forest Glow*

Acrylic on Linen

48" x 72"

2007



*Bronze Sentinels*

Acrylic on Linen

48" x 72"

2007



*Soldier Hollow*

Acrylic on Linen

60" x 60"

2001



*Heaven*

Acrylic on Linen

48" x 60"

2003



*Autumn's Bounty (triptych)*

Acrylic on Linen

48" x 72" each

2006



*Amazing Grace*

Acrylic on Linen

72" x 72"

2006



*Purple Majesty 2*

Acrylic on Linen

72" x 72"

2006



*Exploding Sky*

Acrylic on Linen

48" x 60"

2007



*Gentle Morning*

Acrylic on Linen

36" x 36"

2006



*Layered Light*

Acrylic on Linen

48" x 60"

2007



*After Glow*

Acrylic on Canvas

36" x 36"

2007



*Crimson Reflections*

Acrylic on Canvas

36" x 36"

2007



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