

Exhibition Guide

Organic

The title of our current exhibition, *Organic*, featuring works by Karen Ami, Renee Robbins, Allison Svodoba and Ana Zanic, refers to specific vocabulary used in the field of fine arts. While in contemporary times, organic has come to mean “natural” or not altered by human revision, (such as “organic farming,”) in art vocabulary, the word organic is an adjective referring to forms or shapes that are curvilinear, unpredictable, irregular, and seeming to refer to natural sources. It is a term that is in opposition to shapes and forms that are geometric, with straight or regular lines, angles and edges. Nevertheless, the two uses of the term “organic” are really very close, because they both show nature as a source for inspiration.

While the artists whose work is shown here create their forms and shapes from their imagination, they share an interest in natural sources. As viewers, we are reminded of natural references such as water, flowers, the human body, fauna, underwater creatures; their images seem to be formed from natural causes, whether growth, transformation or flow of forces. Each artist uses her imagination to create forms that do not directly illustrate, but more subtly suggest naturally derived shapes and forms such as those found in the living world. Each artist has a passion for curves, elongations, sinuous lines, and fluidity. The artists here use their materials, whether paint, mosaic, or paper, in such a way that even heavy materials seem softened and gently serpentine. While we know the artist controls the actual shapes and forms, they seem “organically” created by some natural process.

Karen Ami’s work, created of very heavy materials, such as stone, smalti (mosaic glass) and metals, reminds us of the undulating quality of the human body. Curves emphasize the three-dimensional quality of forms, and rounded forms insinuate landscape, mounds of earth, inner organs, or body parts. The forms interact with one another in a way that may suggest merging, stretching, pulling, or moving, all actions that take place in natural processes of growth, transformation and decay. While Ami’s references are not specific, we identify with the forms because they seem so familiar to us. Her colors, too, emphasize the organic quality of her forms, whether colors found in nature, or black and white opposing one another as a force. The forms, too, are always in motion, whether suggesting an embrace, a flinging away or a confrontation. Our human

connection to her works is strengthened by their allusions to emotional expression.

Renee Robbins work seems to more directly reference the diversity of both microbiology and macrobiology. While her shapes and playful forms are inventive, they allude to cellular structures, underwater plant forms, or natural processes happening at a microscopic level. Her painted forms are frolicsome, and yet suggest a strong sense of biodiversity in our planet. She creates an imagined world, with strong color and lively interactions of forms, but the works insinuate a knowledge of biology and science. Robbins is interested in moving “between the real and the imagined,” and her work attracts our attention through its strongly creative invention of forms, shapes, color and line that references nature in its multiplicity of forms. Her use of dark and richly saturated negative spaces makes her organic shapes appear as if bioluminescent, evoking the wonders of nature that never cease to amaze us. The artist’s imagination here awakens our senses to an evocative vision wavering between fantasy and reality.

The work of Allison Svoboda is evocative, too, of nature, but here her soft and subtle use of paper and pale colors seduces us in its gentleness and beauty. Her forms created by the layering of painted papers in mandala forms evoke floral forms, also suggested by the velvety, almost transparent shapes that resemble flower petals. The mandala form, while symmetrical, is tenderly organic due to its fluttering edges and the pliable materials used. Her painted shapes also suggest the interiors of flowers with their gently modulating color transitions as the ink bleeds through the paper. The sculptural quality of the work also increases its sense of organic energy, as if it is in the midst of transformation from one stage to another. Our imaginations reference flowers, moth wings, butterflies, feathers and other features from nature that draw us into the work. Fractals and other natural phenomena become other reference points for accessing work that is both cerebral and beautiful.

The paintings of Ana Zanic is abstract, but use organic shapes and forms to suggest a world of suggestion, mystery and fluid process. Zanic uses the medium of watercolor, allowing the colors to move and blend on and in the paper in ways that create amoebic shapes and curved edges. The process of paint moving within the surface of the paper calls to mind the scientific process of surface tension, absorption and cellular transitions. Zanic’s shapes suggest what we might see in nature in underwater creatures, jellyfish, and other natural forms. Her process of allowing for unfettered water and color interaction is

organic in itself, a natural process of bleeding of paint movement through the paper and the inertia of liquid against a dry area. Then, in addition, the shapes appear organic, evoking natural history, fluidity of memory, and the sense of the irrational, perhaps even dreams.

Each of these artists use the organic to create works that are evocative, beautiful, suggestive and imaginative. Their works elicit our sense of the fragility of the natural world, and yet its infinite ability to endure.

---Beth Shadur
Curator