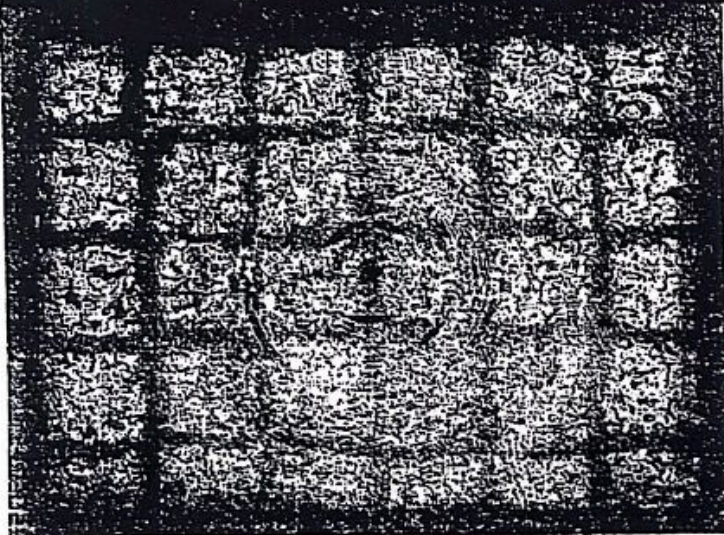


G O L D S T A N D A R D

Beth Ames Swartz Surrenders to Beauty

DONAHUE/SOSINSKI ART



Beth Ames Swartz 1998 mixed media
on canvas with gold leaf

Alchemy is a word used too often and too loosely today to describe the creative process. A found object or borrowed image recontextualized as an art commodity is, in current parlance, alchemy. Lead transmuted into gold.

Few artists understand the term as Beth Ames Swartz does, however. The spiritual sublimation of the self through the act of making art has been a career-long pursuit of Swartz through years of studying Eastern philosophies and using this knowledge as the basis of her life's work.

In the 1970s, with her *Fire Work* series, she combined the elemental forces of earth and fire as a metaphor for the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Later, in her painting suite, *A Story for the Eleventh Hour*, she conceived a

pictorial narrative comparing her own life history to that of human development from origin to near-extinction and finally redemption through spiritual healing.

Healing is once again the central theme in her latest body of work, the *Shen Qi Series*, derived from her growing interest in the ancient Chinese healing discipline following a near-fatal illness. Swartz employs a range of imagery in these paintings, from Shen Qi and Hindu symbols to Cabalistic pictograms, placed against monochromatic fields of blue, red or green and overlaid with a grid of brilliant gold leaf.

Catching the light, the golden squares can in an instant appear to float above the surface, then a moment later recede beneath the diagrammatic geometry of the tree of life or the concentric rings depicting the four worlds.

In Swartz's work, gold is used as the ancient alchemists intended: as a metaphor for spiritual perfection, akin to Kether, the attainment of inner radiance, or total awareness. Unlike many Western artists who mine the wealth of Oriental cultures simply for source material, Swartz wholeheartedly believes in the wisdom of Eastern mysticism and the power of her art to transform herself and the viewer who surrenders to its beauty.

ROBERT COSTA