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ART REVIEW



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Natural Order

By [D. Eric Bookhardt](#)

Adrian Deckbar's oil painting *Forest Floor* depicts nature's own flair for abstraction.

Once upon a time, human survival depended on the whims of nature. The first known art was all about the natural world. Nobody knows for sure why bison and deer were painted on the walls of caverns, but we do know that those were the creatures on which our early human ancestors depended, and cave art may have been a product of rituals intended to ensure a successful hunt. Eventually, the rise of civilization put nature under human control. Or did it? Lately, Ma Nature seems to have a mind of her own, and more and more contemporary artists seem to be responding to a latter-day call of the wild. Adrian Deckbar used to revel in the city and its most urbane denizens.

"For 35 years, I painted people in their everyday environments," she says. Then, one day, everything changed. "I began to feel compelled by what was outside the window, wanting to go as far away from the people, buildings and windows as possible. I decided to paint nature. It is increasingly in danger of extinction. It is fathomless and yet we take it for granted. I knew that this subject matter would generate a new channel of exploration." So the quintessential urbanite began to heed the call of the primeval. No longer bound by the constraints of photorealism, she searched for ways to convey the *élan vital* of the wild, and the paintings in this show are her response to that challenge.

Some, such as *Wild Landscape II*, a closely cropped view of the trunks of young trees glowing in the white/gold sunlight of a wooded glade, reveal photorealist traces in their artfully posed luminosity. But look again and the light and colors seem to have a life of their own. It's an animist quality that may be more obvious in *Primeval*, in the patterns of light and color defining a stand of cypresses in a swamp, and especially in *Forest Floor*, a composition of sinewy coiled foliage in seemingly random arcs and whiplash patterns that suggest nature's own Jackson Pollock moment. It's a far cry from her former views of dreamy-eyed urbanites lost in the steam of their cappuccinos, but life is change, and this is a time of exploration in the art world.

Another response to changing nature appears in *Uncertain Territory: Losing Louisiana*, a



"Connee Boswell is, without a doubt, the most widely imitated singer of all time."

- Frank Sinatra

group expo of nature-based art at the Delgado College Fine Arts Gallery. While including somewhat familiar works by local artists such as Carlos Zervigon, Mary Jane Parker, Jeremy Jernigan and Sallie Ann Glassman, there is also much interesting work by less familiar south Louisiana artists, many veterans of the related Grand Isle Juried Exhibition that has risen to unprecedented prominence in recent years. Surprisingly, perhaps, the result is a very cohesive ensemble in which all of the constituent parts contribute to a kind of collective installation piece. If the science and poetry of the natural world " especially the natural world of coastal wetlands " is the overarching theme, there is also a hint of the lingering shamanic mysticism from which the first art is thought to have evolved.

In that vein, Sallie Ann Glassman's *Grand Bwa* altar and its accompanying poetic wall text invoke the ruling spirit of the forests and swamps, according to the vodun tradition. Its moss, plants, feathers, voodoo flags and images of St. Sebastian invoke the Tree of Life connecting the heavens and the earth for the benefit of all. Works ranging from Yvonne James's *Offering Bowl*, crafted from barnacles, to Carlos Zervigon's *Dangling House* of cast glass suspended from a branch of a sculpted metal tree underscore a sense of human destiny hanging in the balance of mysterious natural forces " a new order that reveals the natural world we thought we knew to be far less familiar and malleable than we had heretofore imagined.



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