



“SuperNatural” Most Natural Thing

By Heather McCaw

June 6, 2011



Detail, “Deep-sea Dreaming,” 2011, ink and gouache on paper

The title of Ann Tarantino’s new show at the Curator’s Office is appropriate, with emphasis on the Natural. In these new works, the artist successfully notates and merges references to all levels of life, from cellular biology to the birth of stars.

Intra 1 initially evokes the feeling of swimming among jellyfish. They cluster and drift apart with some appearing as faint shadows seen dimly through a distance of water. The “tentacles” of these creatures emerge with the lightest of touches. Tarantino uses her own breath and a straw to coax the feathery tendrils of ink across the surface of her paper. But also prominent are dark inky spirals, which at first glance seem like doodles but come to recall amoebas inching their way around a microscope slide.

In the works *Seismic Sensing* and *Deep-Sea Dreaming*, Tarantino pushes her cool palette to include eye-popping instances of neon orange and deep turquoise. In the three smaller works on the wall toward the rear of the gallery, the use of neon reminds me of electrical currents running through marine bodies.

Despite the predominant aquatic feeling running through the work, Tarantino also aims to encompass the realms of land and air. *A Year Without Summer* features a more bumbling form anchored in a possibly wooded environment. A downed tree perhaps, or a chimeric snail? I long to see more of these earthy shapes in counterpoint to the oceanic ones.

In *Old Growth, New Growth*, the recurring spirals cluster tightly together, recalling dense tree rings, an allusion brought home by the appearance of a bird taking flight in the upper left. The appendages of these figures (for lack of a better term) are thicker and stronger here. Wings seem to lash out. The legs of those structures below are no longer tentacles but the limbs of giant crabs. And all of it somehow recalls cells growing and splitting.

Tarantino even tackles the theme of celestial totality in a collection of sculptural cylinders. The viewer must peer into the simple cylinders to view the inky, minute galaxies within.

While making this body of work, Tarantino was preoccupied with caring for her late preterm twins. The experience seems to have influenced her paintings in a powerful way. She says she “felt very much a part of the life continuum... sensitized to the experience of being alive and also being a conduit for the growth and development of two other human beings.”

She goes on to say, “This was exhilarating and daunting at the same time, and I felt an enormous responsibility as well as wonder about processes of growth, replication and development, both in humans and the natural world.”

This artist is able to tackle such a breadth of subjects because she limits herself to poetic visual notations. There is a feeling of barely scratching the surface of these known and unknown worlds. With her inspired command of negative space, Tarantino composes the sparest of haikus, every phrase carefully chosen. The flow of the ink is somewhat unpredictable from a process standpoint. However, Tarantino imposes just the right amount of nurturing guidance, which is what breathes these pieces to life.