

Living Arts

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Galleries

Artists who rediscover the natural world

By Nancy Stapen
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

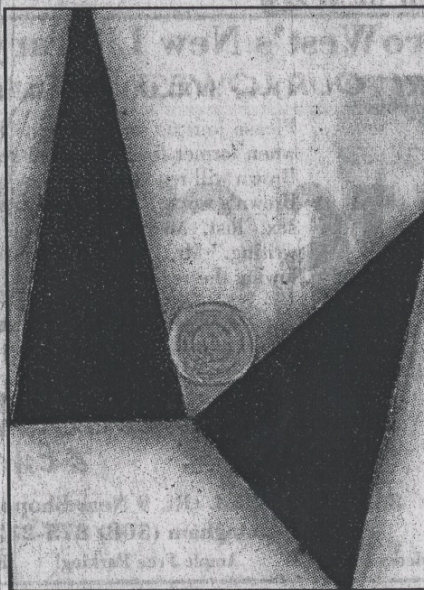
Given the richness of the American landscape, it's no surprise that nature has been at the core of American art. But whereas 19th-century artists were able to view nature as an unsullied manifestation of the divine, contemporary artists view nature as threatened and abused. Earlier artists reflected society's more innocent relationship with nature; contemporary artists reflect the hum of ecological concerns that buzzes in our

collective unconscious.

Yet we have not lost our awe of nature, and some artists directly engage that primary reverence. Since the mid-'80s Nan Tull's work has been immersed in nature's processes; her paintings and drawings speak with increasing authority to nature's sublimity.

Initially Tull created large-scale, close-cropped images of such organic material as flower stalks, shoots and pods overflowing with seeds. These suggested numerous metaphors - fecundity, sexuality and growth,

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Nan Tull's
"Wedge" in
charcoal,
graphite and
pastel on
paper.

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■ GALLERIES

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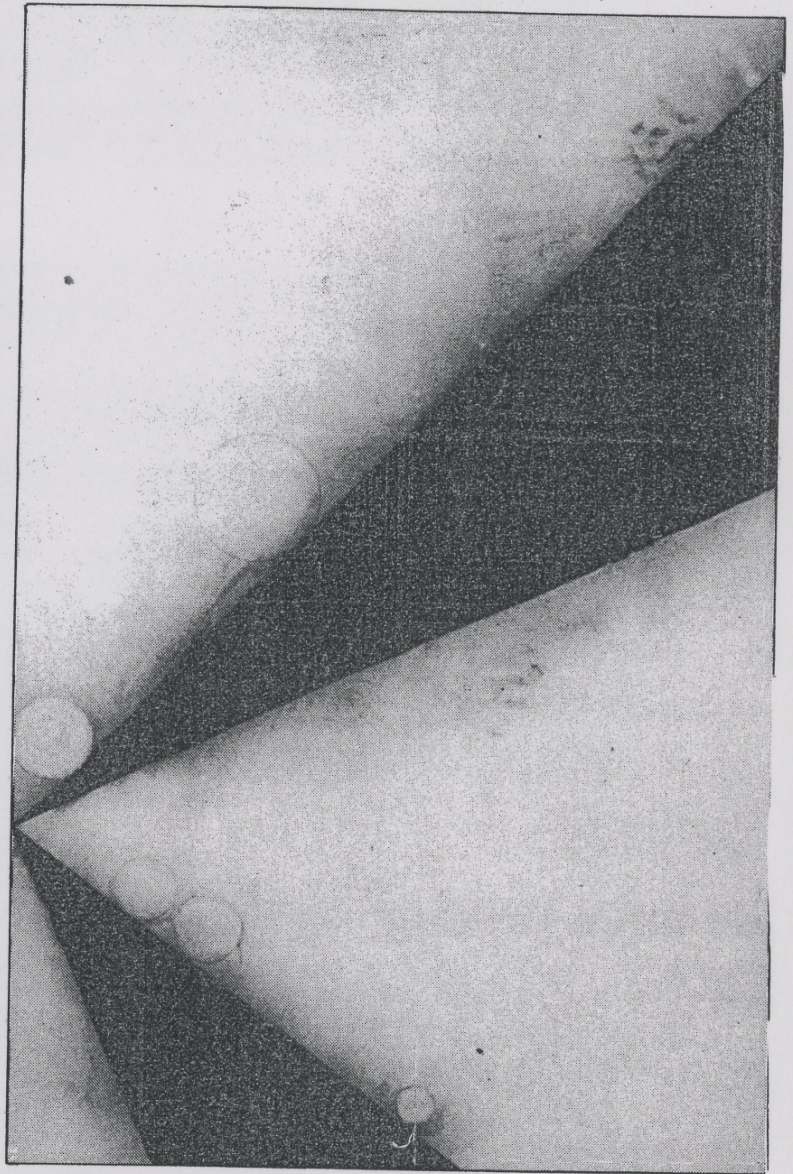
for example – but they also implied that we must humble ourselves before nature, that we must literally bend down and take note of these common but nonetheless miraculous phenomena.

As Tull's imagery has grown increasingly abstract she has shifted her focus from the objects in nature to the workings of nature. What nature does is now the subject, but the subtext remains the same. She implies an urgent need to understand and preserve nature, if we are to understand and preserve the planet and ourselves.

All of the drawings currently on view at the Akin Gallery combine Tull's trademark velvety blacks, which now form geometric rather than organic shapes, with surprising hits of yellow – tiny suns or balls that orbit between abstract forms. All are titled with verbs – “Roll,” “Gravitate,” “Illuminate,” “Irrigate”; they suggest nature's urge toward growth. But they are also about stasis, as in “Wedge,” where a yellow ball is pinned between two black triangles.

This quality of stasis is elaborated upon in a series of small paintings on wood, all titled “Suspension,” in which vertical stripes of oil paint or tape are coated by a layer of beeswax. The stripes become occluded, as if seen through a thick haze. The images conjure nature's resting moments, her shrouded hibernations and silent, invisible unfoldings.

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Nan Tull's "Gravitate," at the Akin Gallery.

**Tull implies an urgent
need to preserve nature.**

NAN TULL
Paintings and Drawings
At: Akin Gallery, 207 South St, through
Nov. 30