

Drawings that touch the spirit

By Christine Temin
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Last winter Boston painter Nan Wezniak grew two amaryllis plants in her studio: One bloomed as it should; the other died. To Wezniak, their contrasting fates became a metaphor for the cycle of life, death and rebirth which is the subject of her large-scale oil and wax paintings and charcoal/aluminum paint drawings at the Chapel Gallery, 60 Highland st., West Newton, through Oct. 7.

In their supple line the drawings are reminiscent of Ellsworth Kelly's plant studies. Wezniak's amaryllis enlargements couple a velvety black form with a gleaming, silvery one. The two twine together in a pas de deux of curling, curving forms that range from sinister to silly. In one, a black shape sneaks over a silver one like a hand in a velvet glove.

The force of the drawings is immediate. The paintings are more complex and invite longer exploration. In a triptych called "The Rose Garden I," two narrow panels in searing, stained-glass reds and blues flank a larger central section all in whites and frigid pastels: passionate burning and then cool resolution. The plant forms emerge from surfaces of thickly painted hatchwork gone wild. In the side panels, tall, columnar stems stretch up in dignified fashion; in the center, the outline of a large white bud is barely discernible in the blizzard of paint.

Perhaps because of the upright, peaked forms resembling Gothic arches, "The Rose Garden I" seems almost a religious piece, a cathedral of nature. Using the same subject, triptych format and similar tonal contrasts, Wezniak creates a totally different effect in "The Phoenix Riddle I," where the amaryllis shapes curl languidly in erotic, slow-moving forms.