



SUSAN SWARTZ

naturally inspired

WRITTEN BY JAMAICA TRINNAMAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STUART RUCKMAN

TUCKED IN DEER VALLEY'S BEAUTIFUL, TREE-COVERED slopes, artist Susan Swartz lives amidst the nature that inspires her. In the living room of her modern mountain home, the natural world is welcomed in through large windows. The room is further enhanced by one of her paintings, *Aspens*, the first in a series of images of strong vertical trunks standing white and iridescent against a ground of warm yellow grasses. The architecture allows nature to inhabit her space, but Swartz says that it's the painting that brings her a sense of being within the landscape. She cannot seem to get enough of nature, both in her home and on canvas, which is not surprising when she explains that her ultimate inspiration is her spiritual connection to the natural world.

A transplant to Utah, Swartz grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the oldest of three girls in a loving family. Although born into a family line thick with artistic and musical talent, Swartz did not consider an education in art until her senior year in high school when her work gained the sincere admiration of one teacher. With the visual aid of one of her paintings (a simple still life that hangs in Swartz's studio today) he pulled her parents aside to tell them that he believed his student had exceptional ability. Swartz then decided to make art study her focus and found her niche in the intimate art department of Edinboro University of Pennsylvania.

She later went on to teach art as the head of a high school art department in Princeton, New Jersey. Now,



LEFT: Swartz is known for her representations of aspens. In "The Fire Within," she turns to abstraction with her use of unexpected hues.

keep changing, so I want to keep challenging myself to paint new things."

In time Swartz's work evolved into impressionistic landscapes, with light, color and movement taking precedence over her ties to realism. Most would say this is where she found her artistic voice, but Swartz insists she is still evolving. The fresher canvases in her studio are alive with abstract textures and shimmering colors, giving you a sense of looking up at glimmering leaves moving in the wind.

Swartz believes that life has given her much to draw upon for her art, and that as she grows and faces challenges, her art will only become richer and more soulful. For years, her work came second to raising her children, in order to provide them with what she saw as the best possible childhood, and now she cherishes the times they

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years later, Swartz still receives an occasional letter from one of her students. "Once a teacher always a teacher," she states with a shy smile.

Swartz worked for years with realism, studying form, line, shadow and texture before expanding her technique, wanting to prove to herself that she could follow the rules before she broke them. "I think I needed to know I could paint like a photograph first and now where I'm going is the interpretation of all that," she says. "I never want to stay in the same stage. I want to

had and the depth it gave her work. In her artist's statement she writes that "seeing the world through their eyes" helped her to "wonder out loud...how I would paint a sunset or do justice to freshly fallen snow?"

Once her children left for college, picking up the brush seriously again seemed a little daunting, but Swartz found an unexpected wave of success. Just last year Swartz represented Utah as the Environmental Artist for the 2002 Winter Olympics, and ended up donating \$150,000 to the event by auctioning off one

Swartz lives within a naturally beautiful setting because she finds it inspiring, so it's no surprise that she continues to look outdoors for subject matter. RIGHT: "The Water's Edge."



Softness and a range of pastel colors define the rolling hills of "Golden Plain" shown left.



TOP: As part of the Transition series, "Transition 17" continues a theme of abstract textures and shimmering colors. BOTTOM: Swartz's "Water Lilies #5."



of her Olympic works. She also created a partnership with the Phoenix Gallery in Park City, which represents her exclusively and helped place her work in a number of respected permanent collections throughout the country. Swartz remains humble and grateful for her career, delighted that in some way she can contribute to her community.

She's the kind of artist who leaves her studio light on because she finds inspiration all around, and it can take hold of her at any moment. When she sees something that moves her, she feels driven to bring it to the surface of a canvas. "I need to paint," she says with determination. "Even if people didn't buy my work, I would still be painting." With all of her paintings signed "Glory to God," Swartz credits her creator with inspiring her continually, saying she can never run out of ideas when "no two sunsets are the same, no two waterfalls and no two cloudy days." All it takes to be renewed in her desire to work is to step out of the front door. 