



"SHADOW FROM THE FLOWERING (THE FOURFOLD SENSE)"
2007

Darren Waterston

ORIGINAL PRINT WITH HAND-TOUCHED AND LETTERPRESS ELEMENT
18" X 13"

PHOTO: COURTESY OF GALLERY 16

SAN FRANCISCO

Darren Waterston:

"The Flowering: The Fourfold Sense" at Gallery 16

Religion is not something that artists and galleries discuss readily: it looks woefully sentimental to hardheaded investors. However, given America's sanctimonious capitalist-warrior mentality, and its visibly disastrous results, many artists are now exploring the idea of spirituality, as did early abstractionists like Mondrian and Kandinsky who studied Theosophy. With contemporary artists, the spiritual leanings are eclectic and non-denominational, with an ecological spin, and blessedly free of the dogmatic certitude and bellicosity that bedevil organized religions.

Darren Waterston's older paintings were lyrical misty landscapes with silhouetted flora and fauna. His newer works, symbolist abstractions, become mindscapes in which ambiguous transparent forms arise, float, flutter, and sink amid mist, clouds, swirls, drips, and vermicular coils of brushstrokes; each image with its poetic cycles of life represents the cosmos as "a divine chaos." A student of Shinto, Japan's traditional animism, Waterston now examines the career of a fellow visionary (though one more attuned to penance, weeping and other austerities than anyone except performance artists). "The Flowering (The Fourfold Sense)" is a series of digital prints based on the legends surrounding St. Francis of Assisi, the 13th Century mystic and monk; they're accompanied by broadsheets printed with scholar Tyrus Miller's contemporary versions of the *fioretti*, the hagiographical "little flowers" that followers wrote after Francis' death. In theological parlance, the four senses are historical (literal), allegorical (esoteric), tropologic (moral, practical) and anagogic (mystical) interpretations of scripture. Waterston's imagery should be interpreted through a contemporary ecumenical sensibility. According to the artist, his works are "metaphors for—or meditations on—transience and impermanence" rather than literal narratives or prophecies; the titles, texts and images work in parallel, but not programmatically. *Mount Verna with Wound* refers, of course, to Francis' receiving the stigmata from either a six-winged seraph or from Christ nailed to a winged cross, but Waterston's ambiguous image refrains from illustration in favor of suggestion. *Leper's Conversion* features a ghostly figure (borrowed from Vesalius) standing amid the artist's familiar orbs (eggs, eyes, breasts) and spermatic serpents. In *Umbria*, a gigantic reddish-pink orb floats in the sky like a strange balloon or eye, covered with blurred dots, as if seen through a spattered windowpane or through blinding tears.

—DEWITT CHENG