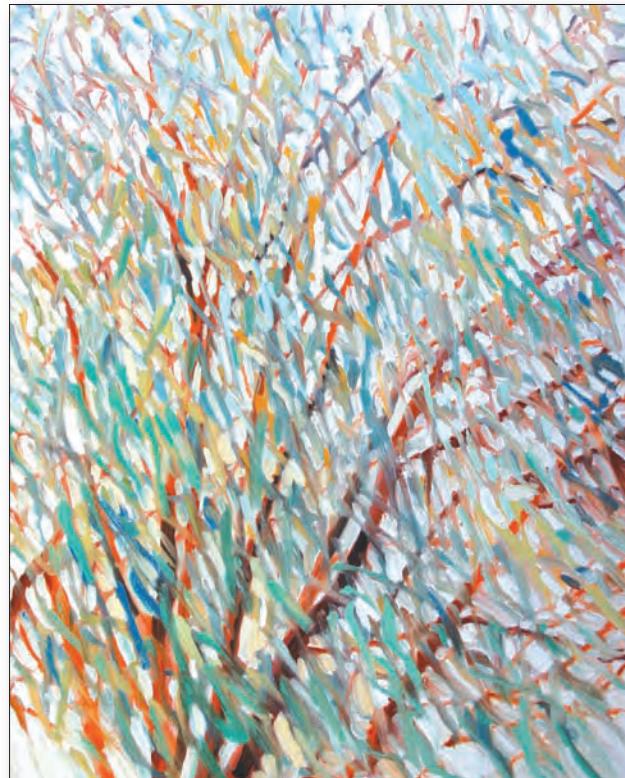


TED'S TREES

Houston artist returns to roots; soars skyward



Summer Willow I



Summer Willow II

By Cheryl Alexander

The first time I met Ted Cowart, one of the Bayou City's most influential and internationally acclaimed artists, I remember being struck by the lightness of his amazing blue eyes. I also remember that though I wondered about his age, I didn't need to ask. Ted Cowart, I determined then, was one of those individuals who is ageless, just like his art.

Five years later, I went back to his home in River Oaks for a second interview. This time, I can affirm that my first impression was correct. He hasn't aged a bit. And again, like his art, he has evolved. In 2008, Cowart was in the midst of creating a series called "Fields," which proved to be a huge success for him. Now, perhaps like his personal evolution, his creative perspective is a bit

more refined and filtered and he is working on a series entitled "Trees."

Where the completely abstract "Fields" was part painting, part sculpture, entirely three-dimensional and a kind of marriage between collage, layering, texture and paint, "Trees" represents Cowart's literal return to his roots — oil on canvas and somewhere between realism and abstract painting. He explains, "You can tell it is a tree, but I take you into the colors, textures, movement — so you feel nature from the painting."

Why trees? He reminisces, "I have vivid memories from my boyhood growing up in the Montrose neighborhood in Houston of climbing in trees. Even then, I was cognizant of and loved their shapes, colors, patterns and textures. I could spend the day in a tree, either pretending

it was my 'house' where each branch was a different room or simply hiding above the world below as a silent observer." Cowart goes on, "Now I have a second-story studio where I paint and work daily that allows me to feel as though I am in a tree house."

This fascination with trees has been a lifelong passion. Though Cowart grew up in Houston, he spent 20 years in faraway locales. Everywhere he went, he tried to find a home where trees were important to the surroundings. "Even in New York City," he shares, "I had a park view outside my windows where I could watch the seasons change. To me, a tree is a microcosm of the Universe — the feel of the bark, the shape of the leaves, the changing of the colors — even an evergreen changes."



Willow Grove III

Cowart's last series "Fields" really pushed the envelope on the look of mixed media abstract. His goal was to experience 21st century painting with collage, water-based paint and lots of marks—drawing in and on the paint surface. "I am so glad I went through this period of work for many reasons," he expounds. "Primarily because when I returned to more representative painting in oil, I was loose, free."

Cowart now paints alla prima—with a loaded brush where all drawing/construction happens in the painting as he paints. There is no pre-drawing or underpainting. He starts the painting and he paints until he finishes it. He doesn't go back over a dry oil painting because "it loses its freshness," he explains. "The painting lets you know when to stop—it releases you—separates from you like a soul from a body. I do not go back and repaint."

Additionally, Cowart is not a "plain-air painter." He says he works best in controlled light in a studio—up above the noise of the city and with music in the background. And he finds his trees all around him, all over Texas—"even West Texas, believe it or not"—but prefers the Gulf Coast or the areas around Austin. "I travel with a camera and sketch pad," he says, "and I photograph and sketch the subjects I feel are interesting. I bring all the important information back to the studio—even clips of leaves and branches or grass samples. I compose an image in my head with all my samples and start painting. I never really know where the painting will take me,



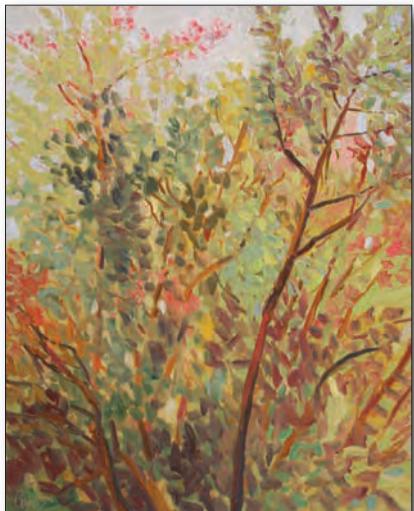
Ted Cowart



Treetops II



Leaves I



Leaves II



Leaves III



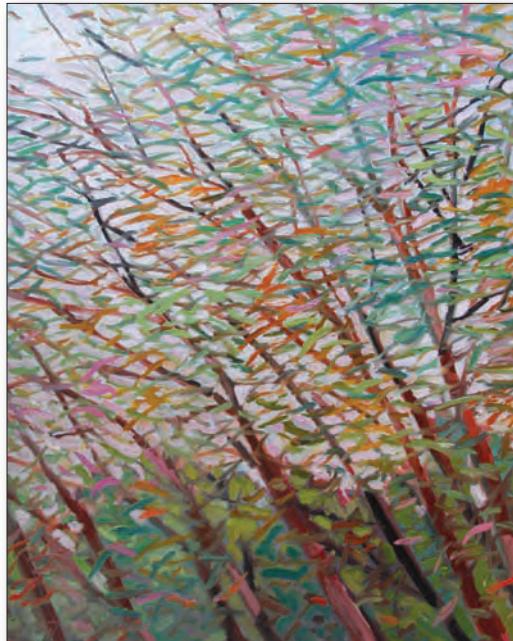
Mulberry

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Cowart says he loves being an artist in Houston and has worked with many of the art consultants and interior designers in the city for many years. "I also like to feature my work in galleries where designers, collectors and just interested people can drop in and see my work." His art has been shown all over the country — Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Santa Fe, etc. — and of course, here in Texas — Austin, San Antonio, Dallas. "But I'm a Houston painter," he confirms. "My roots are here."

For more information on Ted Cowart or to contact him, you can visit his website at cowartfineart.com or find him on Facebook at Ted Cowart Fine Art. ●



Windy Willow