

FLUID DUALITY

Absorbed in abstract struggles



BILL OLIVE | FOR THE CHRONICLE

PERSONAL VISION: Artist Lowell Boyers said his work often includes two images that represent one person struggling with himself.

■ Lowell Boyers finds spiritual, personal ties in *Awakenings*

By EILEEN MCCLELLAND
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Lowell Boyers' paintings portray universal struggles. But there is a hint of self-portrait, too, in the figures who populate his otherwise abstract paintings.

"A lot of them have funny hair," Boyers admits. "Maybe it's because I do have curly hair. And I use hair as a little bit of expression."

"But in general, the figures are meant to be Everymanish. Not too lean. Not too fat. They could be anybody."

"Anybody" doesn't describe Boyers, 40, who is becoming somebody in Manhattan, where he is represented by Briggs Robinson Gallery. His abstract work is collected by a growing circle of glitterati, including Kate and Andy Spade. He also is represented by Deborah Colton Gallery in Houston, where his current exhibit, *Awakenings*, can be viewed through Jan. 6.

In *Awakenings*, his first solo show in Houston, he seeks to capture the first breath of spiritual awakening, which he envisions as anything from a vapor to an explosion the size of an atomic blast.

"It's a spiritual energy," he says. "But I try and not be preachy about it, but just allow it to be expressed in painting as reaching for something."

His spiritual leanings have elements of Buddhism.

Boyers enjoys the serendipity that comes from spilling watercolors on a large, horizontal canvas and the way acrylic paint adds enough shine and texture to represent any number of things: body fluids or vapors, for example.

"It becomes an expressionist time element," he says. "It sits right on the surface and becomes an object. And for me, the more liquid on the surface, the better."

His pieces often include two boldly rendered figures, but these twin images always represent one person struggling with himself, not two individuals. Some of the figures are bound. Their bold outlines contrast with the diaphanous images around them, including ladders, fences, barbed wire, thorns, flowers and even viscera. Fences and ladders appear throughout the *Awakenings* series, signaling limitations to personal liberty against which the figures courageously struggle.

There's another duality at work within the paintings. It's difficult to determine what is happening. "Is he flying? Is he falling?" Boyers asks, viewing *Purification*. He doesn't provide an answer.

Boyers enjoys large canvases because he feels as if he can melt into the painting.

"I like to be enveloped by it, to get physically lost," he says. "It suits my personality."

He also likes to watch gallery goers become part of the work,

Please see **ART**, Page E9

ART: Seeking to engage viewers with the works

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E3

just by walking by. In all, 11 paintings are included in the show, most 6-by-6 feet, others 8-by-10.

Boyers believes viewers who allow themselves to be absorbed into the work mentally as well will experience change: "Small or big, if the viewer is willing to engage, to cross the threshold I provide, something's going to happen."

"Lowell's work is very powerful and strong," says gallery owner Deborah Colton, "yet has a gentle softness to it, with each vision plunging into the deepest depths of our souls. He's one of

AWAKENINGS BY LOWELL BOYERS

■ **Where:** Deborah Colton Gallery; 2500 Summer St., Third Floor.

■ **Hours:** 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays and by appointment Sundays-Mondays, through Jan. 6.

■ **Information:** 713-864-2364

my personal favorites of the artists we show."

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It's a Boyers

In Lowell Boyers's *Book of His Life*, an androgynous figure hunches over a book while another — there's no better way to say this — seems to fuck him or her from behind. The branch-like motif that covers the painting obscures the area where their genitals would meet. Is it blocking penetration or stemming from it? It's just one question posed by "**Each Step, Purification**," an exhibition of the New York artist's work at Deborah Colton Gallery. In another work, *Atomic Self*, a man floats in the air as the vague shapes around him form into a mushroom cloud coming up through his pelvis or looming behind it — the viewer can't tell.



Atomic Self
by Lowell
Boyers

COURTESY OF THE DEBORAH COLTON GALLERY

With patterns that look like Japanese brushwork and people who resemble the holy men of ancient illustrated texts, it's obvious the East has inspired Boyers's style. 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 2500 Summer. For information, call 713-864-2364 or visit www.deborahcoltongallery.com. Free.

— NICK KEPPLER

Graveyard Shift

We called **Pretty Girls Make Graves** bassist Derek Fudesco at about noon and he was in no shape to answer questions. "Let me just, right off the bat, say I apologize; we played New York last night, and I had a very late night, and I'm a little hung over, and I'm laying in the back of the van." It's cool, Derek, we won't hold that against you, but we will admit we're a little jealous of your rock 'n' roll lifestyle. Hopefully, Houston will provide a party as well when PGMG stops at the Meridian today. Led by vocalist Andrea Zollo, the Seattle group delivers punk rock with a metal feel. Its songs keep audiences moving but give way for guitar solos and interesting rhythmic breakdowns. Zollo is known for her ability to scream on key, but these days she tones it down a bit for a more soulful touch. Hopefully the band will be well rested when they play today at 7 p.m. 1503 Chartres. For tickets and information, call 713-629-3700 or visit