

A Cornish Star

There is something of the explorer in artists; some quality, or drive, that compels them to ask questions, seek solutions and relate discoveries. Karen Guzak (Cornish class '76) is such an artist. Karen's work reveals her quests, and challenges the viewer to journey with her.

"I have always loved abstract art," Karen explains, "because it forces us to question. Abstraction refuses to provide us with characters, plots or story lines. It refuses to close down, forcing the viewer to remain open. In abstraction there are no easy answers."

Though Karen's work is non-representational, it does evoke images and feelings connected to the tangible world. "While my work is abstract, it is not disconnected to the world around us. It is reminiscent of many things, most of them are those forces that have shaped my life."

Karen comes from a talented family. Her mother is a weaver and a musician; her father is a geologist who drew his own illustrations. Karen's art suggests their influence. There is a woven look to her latest pieces designed on a

computer, a sense of movement and lyricism in most of her work that is often associated with music, and a fascination with shape and form that draws inspiration from crystal formations and minerals.

Karen created art for most of her life, but waited until her children were in school before devoting her full time and attention to it. She attended Cornish in her 30's, when she was, as she describes herself, "ripe, ready and open." Cornish, Karen says, provided her with the "catalytic agent" that stimulated her growth and confidence as an artist.

Today, Karen Guzak enjoys growing success. Her work is recognized by leading gallery owners and curators throughout the United States and Canada. Most recently, her work was selected to be included in an exhibition that will tour throughout France entitled "Seattle Style." This exhibition, curated by the Musee de Carcassone, features other prominent Cornish affiliates such as Mark Tobey and Kenneth Callahan.

Karen reveals her pioneering nature through her versatility as well as through her images.

Well known for her paintings and lithographs, she continues to push at her boundaries by generating images with a computer. "The computer is a brand-new tool for artists to use," she says enthusiastically. "It's really amazing to me that in one day I might create an image using watercolor, perhaps the oldest medium, and then use the newest, a computer."

"Fascinated" is a word used genuinely by Karen. She is fascinated by the potential found in using computers; fascinated by shape and form; fascinated with the complex and multi-layered; and fascinated by the micro and macro glimpses one can get of the world. Perhaps it is this fascination with things and ideas, this open-minded exploration and willingness to experiment that best describes Karen Guzak the artist, and the person. ■



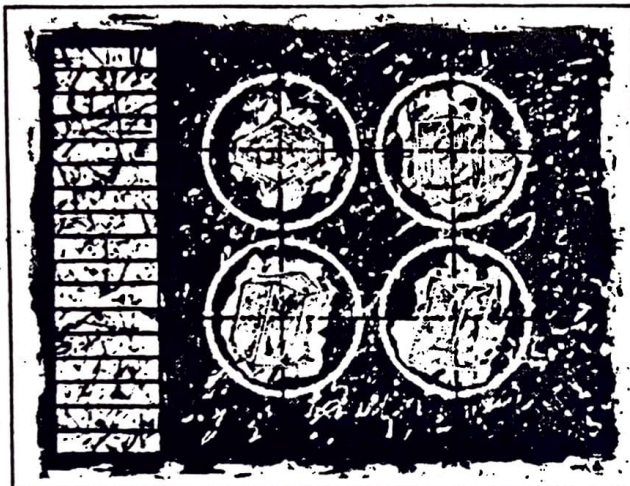
Karen Guzak, Cornish alumna

Karen Guzak's two multimedia exhibitions will energize you

VISUAL ARTS



DELORIS TARZAN AMENT
Times art critic



Davidson Galleries

"Quartz Quartet," a 1987 color lithograph by Karen Guzak, is on display at the Davidson Galleries.

■ Karen Guzak, water-based works on paper, on view through Jan. 3 at the Foster White Gallery, 311½ Occidental Ave. S. 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Etchings and lithographs on view through Jan. 3 at the Davidson Galleries, 309 Occidental Ave. S. 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

for paintings in the Foster/White show.

Beginning with small studies, Guzak arrayed the crystal forms in rows, building up the forms with the solid, shiny impasto of acrylic paint, on fields rendered thin, fluid and airy with stains of watercolor.

The technique is particularly effective in small gems such as "Alchemist's Dream," in which a dozen blocks of thick, gleaming gold are joined by a webbing of gold rays across rose-violet ground. The smaller paintings in the show carry more wallop than the large ones, in which giant crystal forms, with their broad brushes of color, lose the sense of mystery and power, rather like women too tarted up, wearing too much shoulder padding.

"The new-age crystal stuff stopped me from pursuing these paintings for quite a while," Guzak

said. "The movement has provided some valuable insights about vast human potential and holiness, but the commercial aspects of it are repugnant. There are enough charlatans out there that it's hard to tell the truths from the falsehoods. So I hesitated to work with imagery that could be mistaken for new-age commercialization. But I couldn't get these crystal shapes out of my mind."

Their geometries are strongly related to the zig-zag waves which have dominated her earlier art. Guzak's lithographs at the Davidson Galleries are also based on crystal-derived imagery, but this time with the pointillist look gener-

ated by an ink-jet computer printer. She was one of eight artists who shared a year's use of a computer with the graphics capabilities of Ibis software.

She produced the lithographs by a complex process which began with creating color images on the screen. After printing them out in various color permutations, she drew fresh elements by hand onto the prints, photographed them, drew some more on the film, then transferred the images to lithographic plates. Each of her prints represents 11 to 13 printing passes.

Although it has been three years since Guzak's last major Seattle exhibition, her work has been in wide circulation. Her paintings have been exhibited at the New Museum in New York, the Brooklyn Museum, and the San

Francisco Museum of Modern Art. They are included in the "Seattle Style" show of 12 Northwest artists' work currently touring provincial museums in France. The show is presently on view at the Musee Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec in Albi.

Gail Gwinn's small, precise still-life paintings and Art Hansen's floral and landscape paintings are co-featured with Guzak's graphics at the Davidson Galleries. It has been some years since Hansen,

who is best known for his prints, has exhibited paintings, but this show suggests it's been too long. The larger-than-life "Onions," with their deep-green sword leaves and their bulbs swelling through white ground, are analogous to Japanese studies of irises. And the unfolding petals of his giant poppies are the most sensuous explorations of flowers to appear on canvas since Georgia O'Keeffe laid down her brush.

The sheer energy and evolution of Karen Guzak's art is impressive with each new show. She has two exhibitions on view; paintings at the Foster White Gallery, and computer-assisted lithographs and etchings at the Davidson Galleries next door.

Both are filled with the sense of exploration, and represent a break with her past imagery. The grid-work which has long been at work in her paintings has found fresh expression in rows of crystal structures, viewed from multiple angles.

Let anyone misinterpret her intent, Guzak wants it known up front, "I am not a guru."

The imagery was adapted from drawings done by her father, Ernest Wahlstrom, a former geologist at the University of Colorado, who lives in the Seattle area. Drawings he gave Guzak for a text he wrote on "Optical Crystallography" — the science of identifying and classifying crystals visually — were her points of departure.