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'Bloom' at Albany Center Gallery bursts with color, vibrancy

By [William Jaeger](#)

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An installation view of Albany Center Gallery's "Bloom" show.
William Jaeger

With 20 regional artists all unwrapping their ideas of growth and flowers, biology and organic systems together in "Bloom," it feels like an early spring at Albany Center Gallery. And a welcome one, even after a wimpy winter.

The curator's statement makes clear that this show isn't about art that depicts plant forms. Rather it is art, mainly painting and sculpture, that derives from botanical (and biological) design and logic, responding to qualities within the living world that lead to the elegance and complexity that we see in the art. The curator's key notion centers on the word: biomimicry.

The longer you look, the more you see this, with individual pieces crystallizing these ideas using attractive, colorful aesthetics. With so many artists in this compact space, where to start? Try Joy Taylor's "Slap Me," an emphatic big acrylic floral work that clearly (read the title) is more than a study of flowers. Or the vaguely topographic sculptural reliefs by Berly Brown, made of beads, paint, and holographic vinyl in penetrating blues.

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Ali Herrmann creates little ecosystems in each of her paintings, an oval shape like a patch of fertile ground. From this wet, green-brown miasma are greeneries and mushrooms poking up, and networks of roots curling down.

Mimi Young's two mixed media works show tangles of lines, thick and thin, that suggest an organized energy not far from microscopic or even atomic studies. Or so Martha Bone, a series of metal hoops attached in a suspended column seems more mechanical than biological, but within "Bloom" they naturally refer to a spinal column and ribs.

I mostly enjoyed the works on their own terms, in supportive company. The visual force of three small square oil paintings by Monica Miller Link are vigorous, yet detailed in their application of paint, all in hard, contrasty tones and colors, making mundane landscapes become emphatic, nuanced statements of craft and form, of heightened observation.

Likewise, the two somewhat larger floral studies by Lawre Stone were far more than notations on beautiful flowers. The paintings took on a presence of brushwork and color that wriggled all through. The oil-on-canvas "Six Stones" by Cathy Durso made the patterns of yellow-green foliage palpable in contrast with the rounded white-blue rocks within. For sheer blurry-clear brushwork, the three moody and dark woodscapes by Laura Colomb (an area artist now living in Florida) are evocative, rich, and almost alive.

Overall this is a show of very good painting, but there are a number of sculptural works that necessarily take the physical aspects of all these formal ideas rather materially. A pair of large rock-like objects by Claire Sherwood, made of plaster and paper/cardboard painted over in wide black and white stripes, defy easy classification. They end up being both painted sculptures and naturalistic forms at once. Loren Eiferman's constructions made of sticks have flower-like shapes that play with suggestion more than representation as they emphasize their material basis.

Among the most physically satisfying and original artworks here are three unexpected steel pieces by Margaret Jacobs. These hang like old farmer's tools

made of heavy iron, each starting with a large, dark wrench that stretches and elaborates into floral and fruit forms that relate to the titles: blueberry, strawberry, and blackberry. In a way, these drift farthest from the idea of "Bloom," the notion of finding the underlying forces of biological forms. But they go outside this with such confirming authority, they cement the good, open-minded, rewarding sense of the show as a whole.

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