

Manana Dios Dira

# CALM

## REFLECTIONS

story by Beverly Fast

Marvin Swartz settles back in his chair and hugs his knee as he searches for words to explain his transformation from scientist to artist. “I think it was meant to be.”

“I think everything in life is to a purpose. You know, the theory that says it’s not up to you to make decisions, that there’s a natural flow of things. So I think it was pre-destined.”

Swartz is not one for woolly thinking. He chooses words carefully and takes pains to match meaning to intent. He may have left the practice of science behind, but its orderly way of thinking is still a part of his intellectual character.

A graduate of the University of Guelph – B.Sc. in Crop Science and Masters in Plant Breeding and Cytogenetics – Swartz spent 14 years in agricultural biotechnology. When he gave it all up in 1995 to become a full time artist, he says his friends and coworkers “questioned my sanity.”

Swartz had quietly nurtured a life-long interest in art, but his fortieth birthday seems to have provided the push he needed to move beyond the familiar confines of science. Then again, perhaps it was simply time to move on. “When I left science and moved into art, I was becoming dissatisfied with science in terms of a career and a

future. Art, for me, provided freedom of expression,” Swartz says.

From his first solo show in 1996, his leitmotif has been water. Swartz is fascinated by it. “Water is a very elusive subject. I have become intrigued with capturing images of reflections on a water’s surface.”

This reflection and distortion of images is explored in many of his paintings – particularly his Definitely Not Saskatchewan works, the moniker the Saskatoon resident has given to a series of canvasses inspired by various holiday visits to the tropics.

“The act of painting brings me intense joy, the feeling of being alive.”

“With these works, it was the architecture and the water that interested me. The architecture is actually strange, because I don’t normally incorporate man-made objects in my work. But the reflections in the water really interested me,” Swartz says. “Because the water was moving, there was also an element of abstraction. I haven’t done that much abstract work, but it’s an area I’d like



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to move into, and water lends itself to producing images that are abstractive.”

Swartz veers happily between the scientific and expressive modes as he delves deeper into the art of his art. “Because of the qualities of water in terms of diffraction, transparency and opacity, it’s a very complex subject to work on. It offers limitless opportunities.”

“For me, a painting should be peaceful. I can’t paint depressing scenes, it has to be uplifting.”

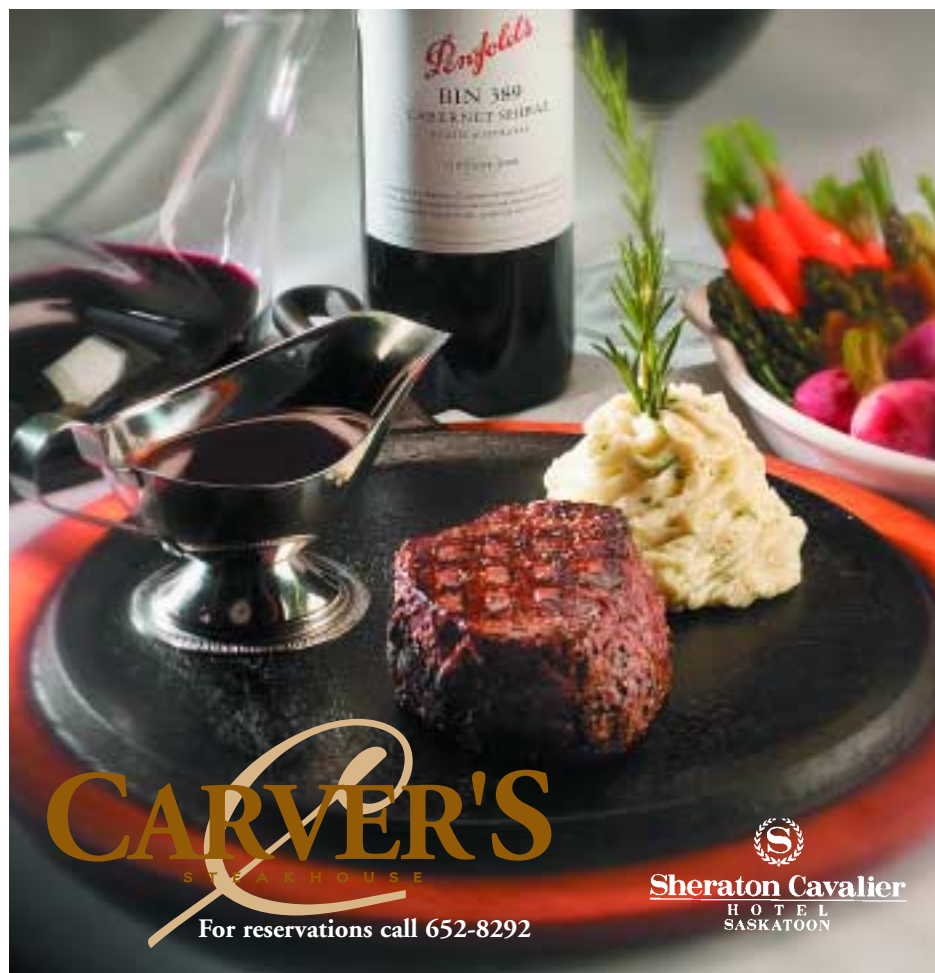
He pauses, then adds, “and water has a very calming effect on individuals. For me it has almost a meditative quality. There are times that I was painting and I would lose consciousness in terms of time and place. I would go into another world and I would be watching myself painting, watching my hand hit the paint and go on the canvas. I’d be removed from it happening but also watching it happen. It’s a really strange experience, yet that’s when I do my best work. It’s almost like an altered state, you’re totally focused on the canvas. It’s a form of meditation.”

In recent years, Swartz’s interest in meditation has blossomed into another career direction – he is one of a handful of Thai Yoga massage practitioners in western Canada. If the juxtaposition with artist, and before that scientist, seems odd to anyone else, it makes perfect sense to Swartz.

“There’s a positive energy that comes from painting and there’s energy happening in Thai Yoga massage, because you’re working with energy lines in the body. It’s internalized energy, while in painting, it’s externalized and visual. Painting is a mental and creative release, Thai Yoga massage is a physical release. But there’s energy in both activities, and they’re both uplifting.”


At 50, Swartz continues to paint and practice Thai Yoga massage. View more of his work at

[www.uvisions.com/swartz](http://www.uvisions.com/swartz).



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