

# Growing images

Ever since the Renaissance, when religious painters depicted Eden and Gethsemane, artists have used gardens to symbolize places of innocence, sanctuary and rebirth.

The oils by Daniel Maffia now at the Seraphim Gallery, Englewood, range from the soothingly traditional to the disturbingly metaphysical. The pervasive image running through all of them, however, is that of the garden.

Born in France in 1937, Maffia moved to the United States in 1959, and now resides in Englewood. He still makes frequent return visits to France, as well as trips to various tropical locales, such as the Caribbean island of Anguilla. He seems to pick his spots for their exotic flowers.

By EILEEN WATKINS

In a few canvases, Maffia pays tribute to the garden most famous of all among artists, Monet's Giverny. To his credit, he does not imitate the Impressionistic technique of the master, but uses his own loosely realistic style to depict the bridge in all four seasons.

The lush flora native to the south of France also thrives in his views of "Giverny Rose Trees," "Purple Dephinium and White Roses," and "Field of Poppies." Despite the variety of shades in these works, an overall mood of green predominates.

Purple foreground shadows contrast with a blast of orange light that falls over the treetops in the Anguilla scene, "Cabbage Palms at Sunrise." The tropical winds that blow through the palms, and the blood-red blooms that contrast with pastel walls, lend excitement to "Caribbean Cottage," "Walls and Bougainvillea" and "Bermuda."

Even in these landscape works, Maffia stops each composition just short of the edge of the canvas, leaving a ragged, unpainted border. He uses this "closed-garden" idea even more clearly in his studies of beautiful birds in ornamental ponds.

In his views of a majestic swan spreading its wings against a dramatically dark background, and a great blue heron preening in a rose garden, he achieves marvelous effects of light through translucent feathers. His "Heron and Cross-Shaped Pond" could be a turn-of-the-century set piece; the pond seems too small for the heron to actually fish in, and chiefly serves as a decorative, rather Oriental backdrop.

He uses another traditional technique in a fresh way in these works by placing his subject at "center stage" for maximum impact.

The concept of baptism and private ritual becomes more obvious in his canvases of humans diving headfirst into pools. A "Woman Diver" in a loose, salmon-colored gown arcs backward into a walled backyard pool, in a mysterious rite of abandon. "Diver and Yellow Door" features a discreetly nude man taking a more dangerous plunge, his arms crossed to shield his face, into a small, ornamental pond; the lines of a spiny plant in the foreground seem to preview his splash-down.

There are no platforms in view from which these characters may have jumped, and it seems obvious that their risky, transcendent acts are meant to be symbolic. Their worlds have literally turned upside-down. While Maffia's plants and flowers are highly sensual, his human figures, even when nude, seem to exist on a more spiritual plane.

On view through November, the one-man show can be seen tomorrow from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m., at the Seraphim Gallery, 32 N. Dean St., Englewood.

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One of the works by Daniel Maffia on exhibit at the Seraphim Gallery, Englewood, is "Bermuda"

Photo by Joe Gigli

## Symbols bloom in artist's work



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