



ART & SOUL

INFORMED BY BOTH A POET'S WORDS AND
HER OWN NOMADIC SPIRIT, AUSTIN ARTIST
MEREDITH PARDUE CREATES A BODY OF
WORK REFLECTIVE OF HER INTERNAL VISION.

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Artist Meredith Pardue (right) adds graphite to an abstract painting in her Austin studio, which also showcases a recent encaustic painting (opposite) and a mixed-media piece featuring paint lids (bottom right). Works entitled *The Body Electric I* and *II* (previous pages) are part of a diptych highlighting Pardue's exhibit at Houston's Laura Rathe Fine Art.



strive to create and share beauty," says Austin-based studio artist Meredith Pardue, known for her colorful exploration of botanical shapes and a compelling, almost melodic, sense of form and composition. "For me, painting is as innate a function as dancing would be for a dancer." After graduating from the Savannah College of Art and Design, Pardue followed this innate compulsion around the country—from New York, to Portland, to her home state of Louisiana, and to and from Texas, where this mother-of-two now happily resides. Those self-proclaimed "gypsy years" opened her mind and polished her singular sense of purpose as an artist.

Pardue believes her own art is about the physical process of painting, as opposed to a cerebral idea, and her canvases strike a delicate balance between chaotic and controlled mark making. What a viewer might describe as negative space—the catalyst to harmonious tension in Pardue's work—is actually the last thing that goes into a painting. The artist says, "If there is a narrative to my pieces, it's found in that relationship between the so-called positive and negative space."

Using mediums such as marble dust, charcoal and oil bars—pastel-like tubes of the sludge recovered during paint making—Pardue

experiments with mixed media and encaustic paints. While she began her career as a figure painter, "soon the figure became irrelevant to the marks I was making," explains the artist, who defines her work as lyrical abstraction. And, although her large-scale, multidimensional pieces may recall images of biological discovery, nature remains merely a point of departure in her work.

Pardue recently completed an exhibit for Houston's Laura Rathe Fine Art, entitled "The Body Electric" and inspired by Walt Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric." Like a poet, but with paint rather than words, the artist strives to scratch below the surface of her work's outward beauty to explore something much deeper and more meaningful. "If the body is a means to the soul, then the object of art is a means to the spirit of that work," she says. "This body of work is a celebration of that beautiful, tactile idea." ■

