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## **“Growth and Decay” Celebrates Cycles of Nature Upcoming art exhibit uses organic materials to explore life and death**

By [Philip Y Gingerich](#), CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On March 2, the University Place Gallery at 124 Mt. Auburn Street will open its newest exhibition. The show, which will be on display until March 31, is titled “Growth and Decay,” and will feature work by artists Sarah Meyers Brent, Jodi Colella, and Sirarpi Heghinian Walzer. Using an array of varied media and techniques, the artists’ works explore the themes of duality, birth, and disintegration. As the title “Growth and Decay” might suggest, materials play a prominent role in their creations; beyond the traditional paint and canvas, the works are composed of organic, crumbling, and self-replicating objects.

Sarah Meyers Brent, the artist who organized the collaboration for “Growth and Decay,” seems to focus particularly on the diversity of her media. Her pieces combine splotches of paint and dirt, as well as flowers wired directly to the canvas, drooping down past its edges. “I believe in material, I believe in having things that are tangible to look at,” says Brent. Life forms grow out of the frames and refute the idea of the canvas as a contained space. While suggesting movement and warmth, these organic forms also convey the ugliness present in nature’s chaos.

Jodi Colella also explores the relationship between material and growth by crafting sculptures that take on the character of living organisms. Her pieces incorporate items found in Home Depot and junkyards; they often employ textiles, such as the woolen balls she creates called ‘seeds.’ In her immense project “One Day,” Colella knits together plastic wrappings from newspapers to create an imperturbable monolithic sphere. Colella, who has a background in biology, also draws inspiration from scientifically-inspired patterns and materials. “I like rust,” Colella says. “It will change the overall structure of the thing you are working on; it never stops oxidizing.” Her piece “Undercurrent,” made of an aluminum window screen, resembles a tapestry of intracellular fluid. Like the dualities present in nature, the piece is simultaneously solid yet permeable, alluring yet painful. “It looks like gossamer, yet when you touch it, it hurts,” says Colella.

The works of Armenian-born Sirarpi Heghinian Walzer add an element of psychological depth to the exhibit—several of her abstract paintings and collages concern human experience and emotion. One of her works featured in the show is a painting titled “Memory of New Orleans,” a reflection on Hurricane Katrina. In it, the white silhouette of a person stands forward, looking away from a deluge of turquoise. The colors are not maudlin, but emanate almost furiously, conveying an ineffable consternation and the necessity of reorientation, both mental and literal—the complete restructuring of one’s own home and life. “It shows the feeling of leaving everything behind,” says Walzer. If one looks closely, one will notice that the canvas is actually slightly disheveled, with bits of fabric peeling off in places. Furthering the sense of decay, Walzer often incorporates decades-old paper into her projects.

According to Walzer, “when we are painting, our unconscious comes to the surface.” Her works tend to be distillations of childhood and memory, focusing on periods of growth in which experience evolves and reorganizes. Walzer’s paintings have been informed by the stories of those around her, such as her daughter’s volunteer experiences in New Orleans and her father’s accounts of the Armenian genocide.

In their collaboration, the three artists of “Growth and Decay” have created a collection of complementary works which explore nature’s perpetual cycles of renewal, degeneration, and at times, devastation. In describing the artistic representation of these dualities, Brent explains that “something isn’t going to look vivid unless paired with its opposite.” In these pairings, the show explores the dynamic transmutations of nature, investigating the interaction between material and subject, science and art.