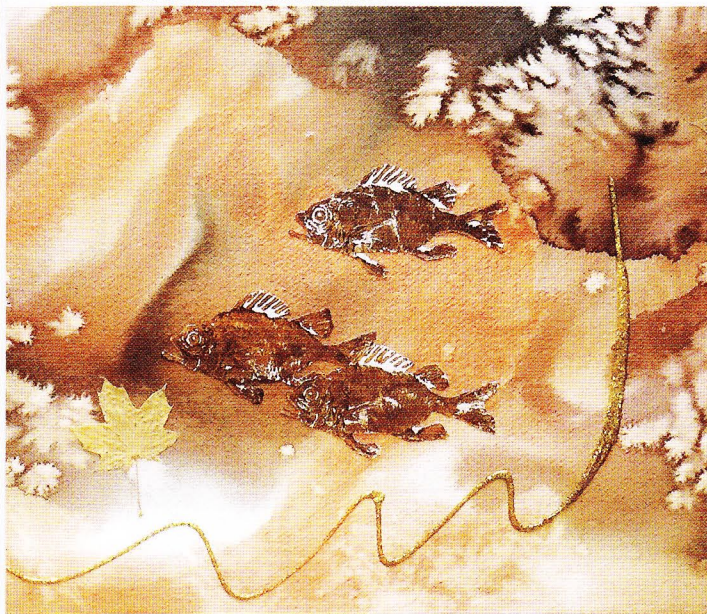


EXOTIC WATERS

Holly Ruggles imparts whimsy and wonder into her marine-inspired art

BY HEATHER LYNN HORVAT



Holly Ruggles may be a new artist to Scottsdale's On the Edge Gallery, but she has been making art her entire life. Growing up, Ruggles' father owned a flower shop where she watched him create stunning arrangements with flowers and other materials.

"He always let me experiment with anything I could find: cast-off flowers, ribbon, wire, Styrofoam, spray paint," Ruggles says. "The impact on my art is undeniable, and becoming a collage artist was a natural outcome."

Her early experimentation in creativity led to receiving a master's degree in art education and teaching art for 35 years. She also received several notable grants for graduate work in art and art history, including a National Endowment for the Humanities to study in Florence, Italy; a Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher grant; and two Freeman Foundation grants for East Asian studies.

Through her education and experience, Ruggles has found inspiration in East Asian art and culture, leading to her specialization in *gyotaku*, a Japanese method of nature printmaking using fish to create an image. However, her approach is different than traditional *gyotaku* artists.

"Reality is not my goal. Rather, I combine my *gyotaku* fish with watercolor and collage to create unique underwater worlds," says Ruggles, noting that she uses multiple methods for her fish images that include molds, original silkscreen prints, and patterned paper.

Ruggles often works on several pieces at once, with each fish painting having three stages. First, she uses multiple techniques to paint watercolor backgrounds. She then begins the time-consuming process of printing the fish by painting the fish's body with acrylic, often blending in metallic paints to create shimmer.

"Each print involves repainting the fish body [to add additional color and highlight], so no two are exactly alike," Ruggles explains. She notes that collaging, the final step, is when "the creative process kicks into gear and the real fun begins."

Drawing from her time in the flower shop, Ruggles takes a similar approach with her underwater scenes. Her hunt for interesting items never stops – pressed leaves, butterfly wings, wool fiber, and miniature sand dollars are some of the objects that often adorn her paintings.

"I always hope to create worlds where viewers will become intrigued and want to follow my fish as they swim through mysterious waters," the artist says.

The environment is a concern for Ruggles, and she hopes her *gyotaku* works transcend art by serving as a reminder of how important it is to protect Earth's precious waterways and oceans.

Ruggles' work can be viewed and purchased at the On the Edge Gallery, 7050 E. 5th Ave., Scottsdale; 480.265.8991; www.ontheedgegallery.com.