

## Three Detroit Galleries Make a Commitment to Understanding

Detroit, MI, November 27, 2002 | *Metro Times*

In the name of reconciliation, art takes up popular images and follows age-old rivers to their source this month at three Woodward corridor venues. Like a crash course in multicultural sensitivity, these large, poetically saturated shows engage us in what often feels like surrealist shock therapy or a tag-team match in an arena floodlit by abstract expressionism.

Painting is the overwhelming focus of Tom Block's "Cousins" at Swords into Plowshares Gallery, where he brings together three bodies of work, each one inspired by a different religious tradition: the Sufi masters of Islam, the Hasids of Judaism and the 13th-century Christian mysticism of Meister Eckhart.

In his Secret Garden, Block has filled the gallery's second floor with scores of small, beige- framed, abstract drawings and quotations from Sufi writings. It's impossible to take in any one of the teeming walls in a single glance, so the clusters of metaphoric images give the impression that the whole of creation is somehow represented. But as the eye zooms in on a text, its tiny words stand out:

*Happy are those who find fault with themselves instead of finding fault with others.*

*(Muhammad)*

Downstairs, Block interweaves two vividly colored, abstract painting styles, one (the Christian series) that vaguely recalls Arshile Gorky's organic work, and the other (the Hasidic sequence) that brings to mind Frank Stella in a delirious mood. The Hindrance of Time and Space (pictured, from the Meister Eckhart series) is painted on wood slats like an old fence or boarded-up entrance that the colors and forms somehow lead us beyond.

Block is a political artist who's convinced that interaction and exchange allow us to recognize our common humanity and to appreciate the shared interface of three religions that are actually "cousins," each being a form of monotheism with roots in the Middle East.

As another quotation from Secret Garden says,

*Even though you tie a hundred knots the string remains one.*

*(Rumi)*

**George Tysh, Detroit, MI, November 27, 2002**