

ART REVIEWS

"Morpho," paintings by Dirk de Bruycker

Through Feb. 26; Scott White Contemporary Art, 2400 Kettner Blvd., Little Italy
Free; (619) 501-5689 or www.scottwhiteart.com

A PAIR OF EXHIBITS SHOWCASE
DIFFERENT TAKES ON LIFE

INTERPRETERS OF THE WORLD

By Robert L. Pincus
ART CRITIC

Dirk de Bruycker is an old-fashioned abstract painter. This label isn't meant as criticism or praise. It's merely descriptive, a point of departure for looking at recent canvases brought together in his solo exhibition titled "Morpho."

The Latinate title of the show refers not to some classical figure or deity but to a butterfly — the blue morpho. The painter, who came of age in Belgium, divides his time between Santa Fe, N.M., and Granada, Nicaragua. It was in Nicaragua that he came upon a dead blue morpho on the floor of his studio. The specimen was being eaten by ants.

De Bruycker describes his reaction in a statement that accompanies his solo exhibition at Scott White Contemporary Art. His prose gets excessive — artist's statements as a genre are often overwritten and overwrought — but he conveys his essential point about fallen beauty and the fragility of life. And this butterfly, according to connoisseurs of the species, is more gorgeous than most. "The iridescence of their scales makes them some of the most beautiful butterflies in the world," one commentator declares.

It's the artist's approach that is old-fashioned, placing his faith, as

he does, in the connection between intuition and the composition on the canvas. No irony, no winking quotations of other paintings for him. He relies on the way personal revelation, distilled in the artist's psyche, can become moody, atmospheric paintings that capture the nature of the original revelation. This was a method that early- to mid-20th-century modernists embraced, particularly expressionists from Kandinsky to Pollock.

Given the intensity of De Bruycker's statement, it's surprising to see how gentle these paintings look: no jagged forms suggesting ant-ravaged wings, no overtly,



Dirk de Bruycker uses classical abstractionism in "Indian Leaf."

deathly hues or shapes. Big expanses of red, pale and deep, in "Blue Morpho I," evoke butterfly contours. The soft terrain of yellow in the morbidly titled "Mort Jaune I" does, too. Most areas of color aren't uniform, but textured with dark lines. Some of their shapes are ghostly, but clearly De Bruycker's paintings don't dwell on death.

Still, they don't do enough in the way of breathing vitality into his meditation on mortality. In their attraction to subtlety, they flirt with blandness. They avoid sliding into becoming merely stylish abstractions, but not decisively enough to bring his encounter with the beautiful blue corpse of a butterfly to full life.