

# M I L W A U K E E JOURNAL SENTINEL

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## REVIEW

### Boyer ties up impressions of antiquity with 'string theory'

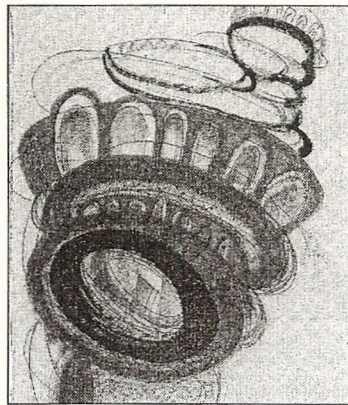
By **MARY LOUISE SCHUMACHER**  
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If "string theory," a line of thinking in quantum physics that suggests everything in the universe may be made of and held together by vibrating, roundish strings of energy, could be translated into art, it might look like the work of Pat Boyer, whose show at the Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum ends Sunday.

Boyer's tempests of whirling, gyrating ellipses seem to possess a graceful order and force that only science could tackle.

The repeating patterns of loops and arches that her varied works have in common are derived from the artist's endless interpretations of the Coliseum in Verona, Italy, built by the Romans in the 4th century.

The visual suggestion of the monument carries an association with antiquity, as do the fluid, earthy colored passages that in works like "Equus" resemble the earliest known paintings from caves.



"Whirling Coliseum," from 1998, harkens back to the 4th century.

The many manifestations of the ruin, even the most obscured and personally expressive, come through, to some degree, as powerfully desolate. The form is simply inhabited by its long since emptied out past, a residual presence of its brutal bloodbaths and trivial entertainments.

But, as if enmeshing the distant past and the present, Boyer's spontaneous, gestural works are very rooted in the 20th century as well, with "Arenas con Arco" and "Bleeding Arena" sharing a strong affinity with mid-century abstractions.

Much of what Boyer does, the dripping and smudgy brush strokes, the pencil lines, creates a visual tension between the illusion and mystery in the works and the surfaces and materials of the works.

The most singular gestures are Boyer's graphite drawings,

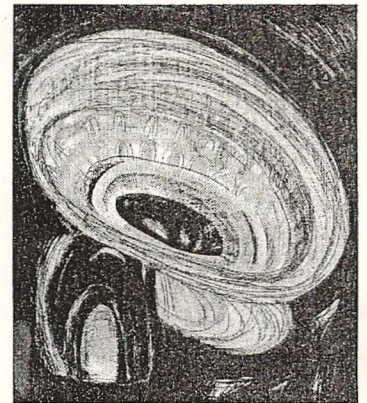
## IF YOU GO

**What:** "Ancient Rhythm: Works on Paper" by Pat Boyer

**When:** 1 to 5 p.m. daily through Sunday

**Where:** Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum, 2220 N. Terrace Ave.

**How much:** \$5. Information: [www.cavtmuseums.org](http://www.cavtmuseums.org) or (414) 271-3656.



"Arena Spin," also from 1998, explores psychological darkness.

which resemble nonchalant, informal, looping marks, the kind of doodling almost anyone does when stuck on the phone with a pencil and pad in hand.

These doodle-like, feverishly insistent marks give the works life and motion, their general idea. It's in that drawing that Boyer decides whether her arches and ellipses will echo one another, expand or contract, pirouette on a point, plunge inward, funnel, coil up or splay out.

Rings and curves of color then give the works on paper their general context, their sense of space and emotional tenor. Blacks, grays, whites, pinks and terra cotta-like colors dominate. In "Weeping Water" and "Primal Bismol," a saturated blood red provides a powerful contrast.

A certain sobriety or even psychological darkness exists

in some works, such as "Arena People," "Arena Spin" and "Levitation," aided by violent, complex distortions and the use of inky, impenetrable blacks and washes of fleshy color.

The violent emotion is reminiscent of 18th and 19th century interpretations of Dante's "Inferno," the famous Middle Ages text. Some of Boyer's work, for example, is similar in temperament to William Blake's "Whirlwind of Lovers," the 19th century painter's take on Dante's timeless tale of the damned.

Other works in the show are quite the opposite. They transform the vocabulary of the old ruin into something with vitality and life, insinuating more organic shapes such as cells, eyes or wombs.