

THE BOSTON GLOBE

Weekend

MARCH 25, 2005

Jose Escofet

Recent Paintings

At: Beth Urdang Gallery, 14 Newbury St., through April 2. 617-424-8468. www.bethurdanggallery.com

**Jose Escofet's
"Spring
Awakening"**



Joy in Bloom

Jose Escofet's exuberant floral still lifes at Beth Urdang Gallery arebrash with colour, bold with an almost photo-realistic style. Yet.... in each painting Escofet captures a moment on the verge of skittering away: hyacinths, narcissus, amaryllis, and more at the height of their blooming.

Spanish-born, self-taught, and now living in England, the 75 year-old Escofet has developed an international following, although this is his first show in Boston. His paintings blend the exquisite attention to detail of a Dutch still life with the contemporary ambiguity

of space that brings his blooms right to the surface of the picture plane. All of his paintings portray his own garden.

He sets "Spring Awakening" against a green-gold ground that seems to hold its own viscous light. It's shadowed at the bottom to suggest the earth, but there's no demarcation of earth and sky, just this veil of color offering up an explosive bed of narcissus and crocuses. Snails crawl amid the leaves. The yellow, red and white heads of the narcissus bob and turn like those of a gaggle of gossipers watching the world go by.

Dutch still life painters like

Dutch still life painters like Rubens commented on a bloated bourgeoisie culture, cautioning viewers about gluttony and greed, and also about the passage of time, with bits of food rotting on a table. Escofet here and there puts in a rotting leaf, and lets insects and snails suggest a cycle of consumption. The ants in "Small Fruits of Summer" are so tiny you might miss them beside the bodacious berries. By and large, Escofet dwells in the satisfaction of desire, not the anticipation of disappointment. There's no moralizing here, and no dark side – just the artist's joy in looking, and his impressive technical prowess.

By Cate McQuaid