

RIOT MATERIAL

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Another Week in the Death of America

JUNE 1, 2020 BY [EVE WOOD](#) — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

Samantha Fields, *American Dreaming*

at LSH CoLab, Los Angeles

Reviewed by Eve Wood

The first verse of the Mamas and the Papas seminal 1960's anthem California Dreamin' begins with "all the leaves are brown, and the sky is grey," at once establishing an atmosphere devoid of color, hope and youthful abandon, and certainly not a description one would associate with the sunny, carefree lifestyle that has become emblematic of the quintessential California experience. Ultimately the song is a lament, a yearning to return to a brighter, more hopeful landscape, if only in the songwriter's mind. Samantha Fields solo exhibition, *American Dreaming*, could be said to expand on this longing, albeit taking a darker more ominous approach.

The idea that someone might actually "dream" in today's fractious America is rapidly becoming an antiquated notion at best, replaced with the ever-expanding undercurrent of hatred, bigotry and misogyny that has, sadly, always informed the backdrop of American history. Certainly, black culture in this country has been brutalized by the promise of a dream that is constantly denied, bastardized, pillaged, raped and then reasserted over and over. Samantha Fields vision of the world can be understood through this lens where even the very notion of hope is exemplified in a spray of colored confetti that punctuates each burning landscape. Imagine putting a Band Aid on a gangrenous leg, believing that this gesture alone will somehow make a difference. Looking at these paintings feels very much like this, as there is an urgency, a necessity posited within each of these works for crucial and immediate change. At its best, art is a reflection of the world around us, a mirror to hasten change, not deny it. All of the paintings in this exhibition are, in their own

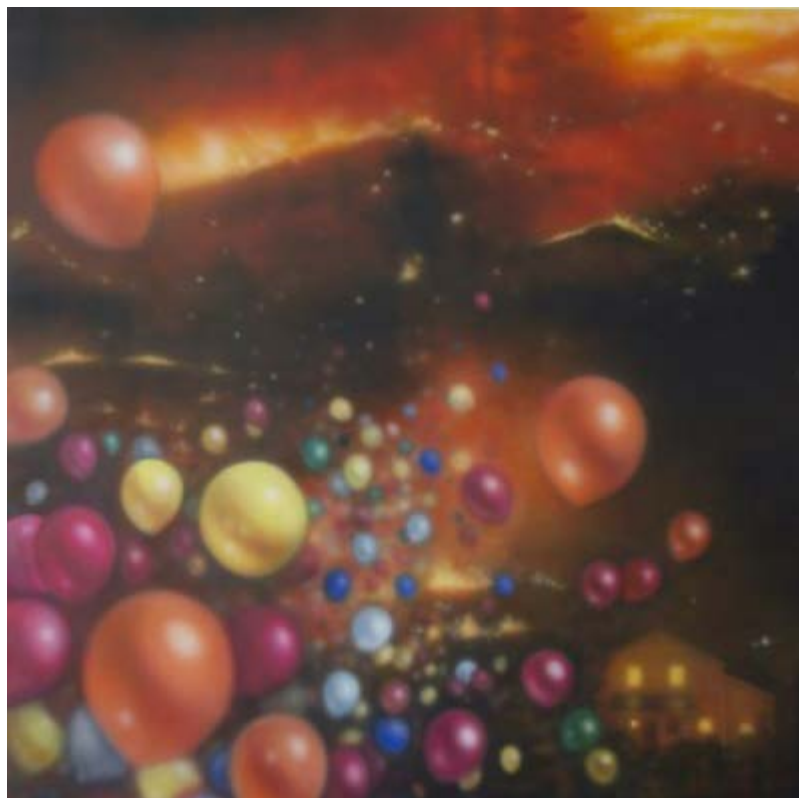
way, a call to arms, a battle cry for a dying planet.



Another Week in the Death of America

Most strikingly, very few of Fields' paintings contains a literal human body as though all human culpability were funneled into each new disaster. For example, in the painting "Another Week in the Death of America," 2020, we see a jetliner on fire, in its final descent to ground. Perhaps more than any other human advancement, flight could be said to exemplify both our greatest achievement and the pinnacle of our arrogance as a species. Most assuredly the planes that populate Fields' startlingly stark and fiery landscapes are populated with human beings, yet we cannot see them, and are left only with the symbols of their advancements. Thus, these paintings feel more like metaphors for loss, though within each there is always an excuse for celebration, even at the cost of human life, as an explosion of brightly colored balloons surrounds the downed plane. This is an image that repeats throughout the exhibition in various iterations. Fields utilizes the image of the balloon and falling confetti as dynamic visual tropes. The floating bodies take the place of human forms as though standing in for us in each increasingly apocalyptic scene, empty-headed emissaries sent on ahead of us.

Strangely, the most ominous work in the show is not a painting of disaster at all but of Fields' parent's home in rural Ohio. Starkly contrasted with the other works in the show, the painting is an image of the back of the house with a snow-covered car in the drive, yet even here, seemingly far removed from the maddening crowd, confetti rains down like fire. We can kid ourselves all we want that we are safe, but Fields teaches us that the devastations of the world are painful and far-reaching.



Dynamic Messaging

Fields also conflates disaster with celebration. Rarely do you ever see confetti or balloons at a funeral, yet in Fields' dynamic universe, the balloon functions as a strangely allegorical element, a harbinger of disaster, but also suggests the leavings of our human existence. Balloons can travel thousands of miles and pollute the most pristine environments. They've been known to cause dangerous power outages and countless fires, but they also kill countless numbers of animals every year because they can be mistaken for food. All in all, another seemingly innocuous and completely useless human invention. Nothing captures this sense of inane hubris like the painting "Dynamic Messaging," 2020, that foregrounds a huge number of balloons flying into a forest fire. The painting is as much about our arrogance and complete lack of responsibility as a species and as stewards of the living world as it is about an actual landscape burning. This is Fields' great genius – to posit for us a dramatic and traumatic event, all the while slyly and indirectly insinuating that we are the ones responsible for it in the first place. There is no pointing of fingers or literal translation of our human culpability here, only a dense flurry of colored balloons overtaking a dying landscape.



American Dreaming

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Eve Wood is Los Angeles Art Critic for Riot Material Magazine. Ms. Wood's poetry and art criticism have appeared in many magazines and journals including Artillery, Whitehot, Art & Cake, The New Republic, The Denver Quarterly, Triquarterly, Flash Art, Angelino Magazine, New York Arts, The Atlantic Monthly, Artnet.com, Artillery, Tema Celeste, Art Papers, ArtUS, Art Review, and LatinArt.com. She is the author of five books of poetry. Also an artist, her work

ART PICK: SAMANTHA FIELDS: *AMERICAN DREAMS*



SHANA NYS DAMBROT

JUNE 13, 2020



Los Angeles painter Samantha Fields gained recognition for her lovingly rendered images of disasters and disorientations in the natural landscape and built environment — fires, floods, tornadoes, and the like. But since 2016, her concept of destruction has expanded to include the chaos and confusion rampant in this chapter of our social and political history. While her iconography and palette intensified, the images have remained metaphorical, with emotions evoked and Cassandra-like warnings issued, and dark humor abounding as a strategy for staying sane.

The exhibition will be up at LSH Colab on Virgil Ave. from June 14 – July 11, with both an opening reception on Sunday, June 14 (4-6pm) and appointments available Wednesday – Saturday (noon-5pm). Contact the gallery to schedule a time, and if you're thinking of attending this Sunday, wear a mask and plan to observe social distancing, which may include chilling outside for a second if someone's already in there. **Sunday, June 14, 4-6 p.m.; [instagram.com/lsh_colab](https://www.instagram.com/lsh_colab).**

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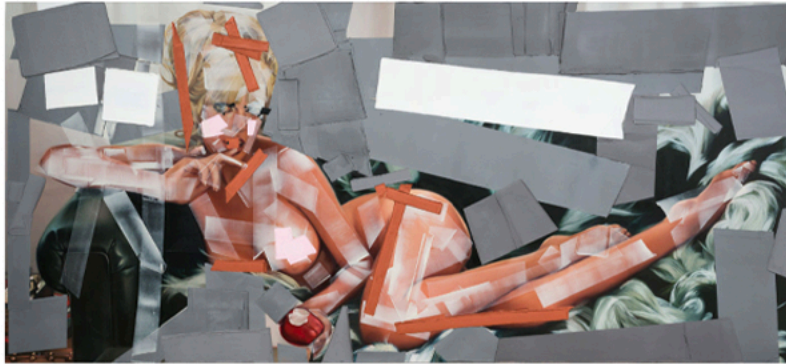
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Rebecca Campbell, *Miss April 1971* (2015), courtesy of the artist and L.A. Louver, Venice

REBECCA CAMPBELL AND SAMANTHA FIELDS

University Art Museum, CSU / Long Beach

by John David O'Brien ·

May 3, 2016 · in



In this two-person exhibition of paintings, drawings, collages, sculptures and writing, Rebecca Campbell and Samantha Fields mine their own personal histories, passing them through the filters of their respective multifaceted art practices, and elevate them to models for critical appraisal, both art historical and social.

Starting with the curatorial premise that each artist pick an image from around the time that she was born, and, branching out from there by delving into their recent and past output, forging a collaborative improvisational “call-and response,” they provide us with a compelling view into the ad hoc community we call the “art world.” Fields’ *Transplant* (2015), a work referencing the 1972 landfall of Hurricane Agnes, and Campbell’s *Miss April 1971* (2015), a painting derived from that month’s Playboy magazine centerfold, are the loci of this 18 month collaboration in which each work prompted the other artist to create or select additional artworks in an interweaving of thematic leads.



Samantha Fields, *Transplant* (2015), Courtesy of Samantha Fields and Traywick Contemporary

Transplant, from Fields’ most recent photo-based body of work in which she paints landscapes that she traverses, reflects the deformations and modifications brought about by her use of film. Whether representing lens flares or digital blurs brought about by the camera itself or the streaking and flattening of light as recorded through windows and windshields, Fields points the viewer at both the representational and pictorial aspects of her images. Campbell’s painting diverges slightly from her previous interest in autobiography and documenting women she knows: with *Miss April 1971*, she toys with paint to obscure and draw attention to the nude while engaging formal aspects of painting through a calibrated and systematic use of palette knife swatches and large blocked-out fields of white and gray. Both artists seem to encourage the viewer to oscillate back and forth between seeing their painting as something representative in the world or as paint, which acts in and of its own material accord.

The differences between the way these two artists are normally categorized (simplistically reduced to atmospheric landscape painting for Fields and figurative feminist painting for Campbell) are quietly and effectively dismantled in the overlapping works taken from different times of their overall production and in the multiple vitrines containing drawings, thumbnail sketches, photo-collages, and test paintings from the artists’ studios. In these and in each artists’ writing, themes and ideas are played out in a far less easy to categorize way. The complexity of an artist’s practice is much more effectively delineated in the disorderliness of the studio—recreated in facsimile in this context—than in the reductive format commercial galleries necessitate. With generosity and abandon, Rebecca Campbell and Samantha Fields have produced new artworks inspired by dialogue with one another about the nature of creativity, and in the process, they have given us a view into a time when linguistic categories and stylistic uniformity aren’t the only means we have to understand and appreciate the creation and evolution of artists and their work.

or gather in large chaotic groups, cherries escape their box, humble pears nod to each other like two old men sitting on a porch. The paintings' titles further poke fun: *Four Apples* (2004) actually depicts five (if you look closely; one has been painted out, another almost completely so, and another is almost off the canvas). And the title *Still Life with the Smartly Spaced Down-Rolling Oranges* (2002) is simply funny all on its own. The landscapes however, maintain not a seriousness, but serious beauty. Often composed of deep blues, bright greens and whites, they look out onto a faraway horizon; a long summer afternoon, calm and thoughtful.

Regardless of subject matter, the works share evidence of "mistakes," composition rethought, objects covered up, paint drips. The artist wants to reveal his process—the scars and history—which only adds to their beauty. Indeed, often so shallowly hidden, the mis-strokes become as much a part of the painting as what is evident. Because Staprans's paintings are not about their subject; his choice of the mundane removes any narrative. He wants to share something more than immediately meets the eye. He draws us in just a little closer to experience something beyond it a visual experience. In an essay that appears in the book that accompanies this exhibition, Paul J. Karlstrom notes: "... Staprans maintains that, for him, painting is not an intellectual process but an entirely sensual one." And so it is for the viewer too.

—Chérie Louise Turner

Raimonds Staprans: *Art of Tranquility and Turbulence* closes March 19 at the Pasadena Museum of California Art, 490 E. Union, St, Pasadena.

Chérie Louise Turner is a freelance writer based in Tahoe City.

'NightLites' at Sabina Lee Gallery

In many ways, recent art in Los Angeles has favored the large, the bright and the bold. *NightLites*, a group show of six—Wendy Adest, Jon Elliott, Samantha Fields, Niki Lederer, Mery Lynn McCorkle and Andra Samelson—at Sabina Lee Gallery, provides an enigmatic respite. Each of the artists has an idiosyncratic vision of the theme—night, shadow, a light in the dark—and of their media. Though less than fully realized in places, the exhibition is characterized by an overall sense of individuality. Group shows, especially themed ones, can invite the unenlightened impulse to compare—big, small/like, don't/like, dark/light, but

NightLites is different. The broad range of materials and the fact that the artists genuinely address the theme, lend a democratic spirit to the show.

Adest's installation, *Fireflies*, expresses a tension between fancy and danger that prevails in the show. A series of faint lines—part magic circle, part bull's eye—encircle moths and fireflies on dark, hazy spheres that float on the wall like a stream of bubbles. Portals into an obscure fog that seems ordinary at one glance and otherworldly the next, the circles are rimmed by a neon glow from the transparent Plexi bases. Adest's use of hand coloring in combination with computer-generated imagery is beautifully handled, at once elegant and uncanny.

Circles are echoed, and then endlessly repeated, stretched and otherwise distorted, in seven remarkable paintings by McCorkle. Layer upon layer of variations of gold, magenta, blue form and reform into circles, parts of circles, patterns making circles. I would locate them somewhere between the middle of a crowded, pulsing dance club and the point just in front of a swarm of lights. The circles and ovals are made up of repeated shapes that often resemble, in an odd twist, small, plastic fingernails. Pills and flowers, fractured rainbows and broken glass, there's something black in all this brilliance. Though Fred Tomaselli comes to mind, Yayoi Kusama is a more accurate a reference; there is an insistence and anxiety to McCorkle's work that sizes delightfully through all that structured geometry.

Samelson's *Blue Prints* share a similar, if toned down, obsession. The huge, carbon copy-blue image is eerie. From across the room, it looks like a hugely magnified fingerprint and closer inspection

reveals a web of intricate ballpoint traceries. It's as if the universe were contained on the head of a pin, or the thumb of a giant.

Perspective shifts again in Fields's *Come and See*, where a miniature person, a deer, a bear and a mouse attend a tiny, lone campfire in the bottom corner of the canvas. Dwarfed by a massive, smoky sky, the fire and its attendants seem to be a mirage in the desert of a very long night.

Two sconces by Lederer have a garage sale funkiness that is eclectic and fun; if the night was getting creepy, these hold up a winking light. It could be the limited format of a group show, but the works of Fields and Lederer share a preliminary quality, like sketches of a larger idea.

Three paintings by Elliott veer from the fantastical to the bleak and highlight the welcome eccentricity that reverberates through *NightLites*. Similar in concept to Nigel Cooke's massive, post-apocalyptic pieces, these small mixed-media paintings share the spirit of Philip Guston's later work. Lines scratched into glossy, black enamel surfaces trace outlines of a city that forms here and disintegrates there, marred by course, cement-like patches of polymer and stippled with cascades of pastel dots forming ephemeral clouds out of refuse.

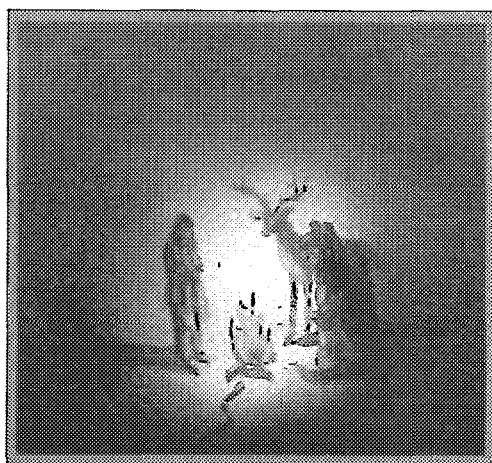
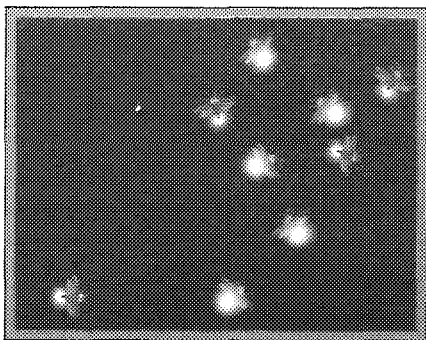
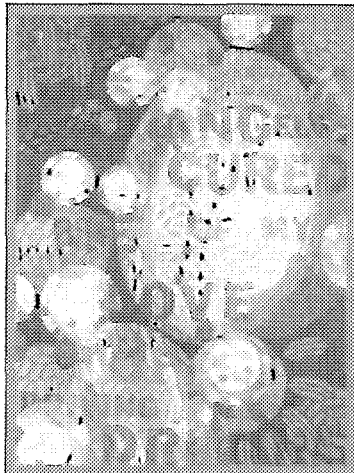
Maybe I'm still reeling from all those big, bright paint fumes swirling around town, but the work of these artists seems to speak to our precarious and stifling times. Like an unexpected heartbeat or the metropolis at 3 A.M., they are dark and leering, intoxicating and fanciful.

—Annie Buckley

NightLites closed in January at Sabina Lee Gallery, Los Angeles.

Annie Buckley is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

From top: Mery Lynn McCorkle, *Cured*, 2005, acrylic on panel, 30" x 22-1/2"; Wendy Adest, *Fireflies*, 2004, photo print on Plexiglas, hand colored with charcoal, acrylic wash; Samantha Fields, detail of *Come and See*, 2005, acrylic on canvas, 72" x 48", at Sabina Lee Gallery, Los Angeles.



Charles Long at Shoshana Wayne Gallery

Naturalism ... says in effect, "The room in which we find ourselves is fairly comfortable. Draw the curtains, for the night is dark: and let us devote ourselves to describing the furniture: Unfortunately, however, even the furniture refuses to accommodate itself to the naturalistic view of things. Once we begin to examine it attentively, we find that it abounds in hints of wonder and mystery: declares aloud that even chairs and tables are not what they seem."

—Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*

Formalist innovation in the early twenty-first century can be as calculated and stylish—and vacant and flattering—as academic naturalist narrative could in the mid-nineteenth century. The pace set by the art market results in work that is often, to quote Harold Rosenberg, "a centaur-like being—part words, part art supplies," and satisfying neither as visual nor verbal artifact. The recent sculptural work of Charles Long questions the current paradigm of theory-based (high concept, high production values) consumables comprising what he calls "the global culture of fun museum shows and magazines." The funky metaphysical contraptions he has fashioned for *More Like a Dream Than a Scheme*, by contrast, derive from "old-fashioned modernist means," according to *Art in America* writer Raphael Rubinstein, and are both intensely personal and, to the attentive viewer, thematically and emotionally rich. "Objectifications of psychological states ... [that] speak of the spiritual through the material," they're sad, funny, joyous, poignant, ghostly and profound. A small selection at Shoshana Wayne Gallery from this body of work—two sculptures, sixteen photos and a short video—provides a tantalizing sampling of previous larger shows at Brown University and Site Santa Fe; an excellent catalog with essays by Vesela Sretnovic and Gregory Volk is available.

Known until now for his sleek constructions marrying furniture with blobby humorous silicone concretions and excrescences (*Our Bodies, Our Shelves*) as well as his multimedia collaborations (*Amorphous Body Center*, with music by Stereolab), Long is an inventive and eclectic sculptor, with wide-ranging interests in such disparate styles as *arte povera*, performance, and, for a time, standup comedy. His influences include modernist sculptors such as Ibram Lassaw, Isamu Noguchi, Theodore Roszak and Seymour Lipton. After several years' absence from the art scene, he has reemerged powerful, returning to sculpture's "autonomous object" tradition



Samantha Fields: *Storm Anvil over the Great Plains (Nebraska)*, 2007, acrylic on canvas on panel, 42 by 36 inches; at Kim Light/LightBox.

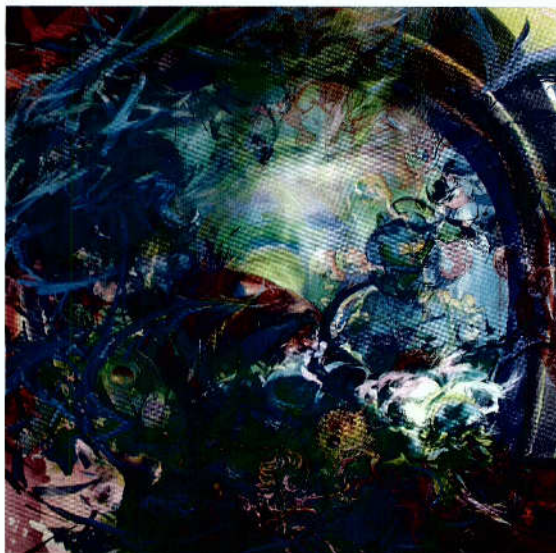
LOS ANGELES

Samantha Fields at Kim Light/LightBox

Environmental drama of Shakespearean proportions is the best way to describe the unrestrained atmospheric landscapes that constituted Samantha Fields's major solo exhibition, "This Land." The nine medium-size airbrushed canvases (all 2006 or '07) are synthesized compositions collaged from photographs she took chasing storm cells across the U.S. Fields contemplates the darkest possible outcomes of man's impact on nature and the ever-present possibility of natural and manmade apocalyptic intrusions—acid rain, global warming, nuclear winters, wildfires, twisters, earthquakes, etc.

The artist's previous works

Iva Gueorguieva: *The Blue Rider*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 90 inches square; at Carl Berg.



examined molecular patterns, genetically engineered flora and curiously rodentlike fauna, and the ascent of early man as a dominant force on earth—hairy bipeds brandishing weapons. In spite of her disaster-based mantras and eco-political subtexts, Fields never loses sight of an esthetic informed by the sublime. Her sophisticated, historically grounded gaze, referencing artists as diverse as Bosch and Ross Bleckner, Goya and Beverly Fishman, is as concerned with formal issues as with social consciousness. Now that her work is mostly devoid of people or manmade products, displacement and reclamation are the

key metaphors. *Storm Anvil over the Great Plains (Nebraska)* is in the tradition of Leonardo's deluge drawings and Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow*. Her use of light and shadow further exaggerates the viewer's perception of movement and pictorial depth, as the storm moves across the canvas—wild cumulonimbus clouds spread their ominous wings over hundreds of miles of heartland as a hopeful, luminous blue sky is sucked into a gargantuan black hole tearing through the lower right quadrant.

Wilderness at Twilight (Yellowstone), the largest of the new paintings, suggests a post-nuclear scenario. Thick, rusty clouds bear down heavily on a thin undulating band of parched earth while simultaneously blotting out life-giving sun. The barely visible remains of a defoliated forest

stand tall and populate the brooding terrain as if waiting for something other than their apparent destiny.

Fields's pictorial solutions are never simple. She builds tension by juxtaposing familiar and idealized iconography with psychologically charged allusions, and she skillfully employs color theory, hyper-narrative and the inherent grandeur of the Western American landscape.

—Joe Lewis

Iva Gueorguieva at Carl Berg

There is a lot to like about the expansive, turbulent canvases of Iva Gueorguieva, from their varied and inventive brushwork to their radiant, Romantic palette to the stealthy presence of ghostly, humanoid creatures she picks out of the morass. In her second solo show at this space, the Bulgarian-born artist, who studied with Dona Nelson at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, structures the more successful of her landscape-like spaces around large, readily legible subdivisions of the picture plane, grounding her churning, overwrought vistas in familiar compositional conventions.

At roughly 8 by 18 feet, *Gyre* (all paintings acrylic on canvas, 2007) devours the viewer by virtue not only of its size but its colors, wildly divergent in both value and hue, and its skittish but purposeful touch. A swath of blue and green splinters the painting, pushing hot colors to the edges. It is a spiraling torrent that might represent wind or water, and it sucks the viewer into a vortex of fire and ice. The exhibition's title, "Gyre Carling," refers to a supernatural being in Celtic lore, the Queen of the Witches, who controls the weather and is prone to shape-shifting. Let's say that Gueorguieva does not shy away from melodrama.

The nature of the ground varies. In *Thick as Thieves*, a clamoring, heaving heaven looms above the limpidly glowing horizon, set low in the frame; mediating between the two is a charred-looking, demonic head sprouting antlers or branches. The paint's crisp delivery, on a plain gesso ground, differs greatly in effect from *The Blue Rider*, which is painted on raw canvas into which the initial application of paint soaks. The soft-focus glowing stain of pale blue and yellow-green implies an orb of distant, heavenly light that frames and contains the mad flurry of strokes whirling through the foreground. An absorbent gesso ground lends a pallid, watery look to another painting, *These are Places where nothing is wrong but there is Something wrong*; lacking a strong structure, however, its 6-by-9-foot expanse is claustrophobically dense and chromatically flat.

In a selection of works on paper, *Sleepy Genes* is a standout. At 3 feet across, it is intimate com-

pared to the canvases, but it is similarly full to bursting and also relies on the contrast of broad, sweeping application and finer drawing. Sprightly hues of rose, violet and green gouache dominate; blackish ink provides ballast. The interplay of line and shape animating the paintings is here further complicated by the tactility of a collaged surface and by creeping figurative references.

Gueorguieva's work recalls the swirling, elastic space and dissolving forms of Futurism, the bombast of the high Baroque and the grand scale of Hudson River School painters like Bierstadt and Church. Julie Mehretu and Cecily Brown are compositional cousins. But Gueorguieva is no *pasticheuse*; she is well on her way to making this canny blend of sources and enthusiasms her own.

—Stephen Maine



Sean Higgins: *Terraform*, 2007, inkjet print transfer and acrylic on Plexiglas, 36 inches square; at sixspace.

CULVER CITY

Sean Higgins at sixspace

A University of Pennsylvania graduate making his solo debut, Sean Higgins crafts photo-based hybrids that yield appealing if deliberately vague depictions of water-bound land masses. Most of the works shown at sixspace are square, ranging from 2 to 5 feet on a side. Higgins shot some of the source photos and appropriated others; whether verdant and sylvan or barren and desolate, all the islands are seen from elevated vantage points that emphasize their isolation. Each photo is enlarged and transferred to the back of a sheet of Plexiglas. The front side is then carefully sanded

show strikes a balance between what is expected of pink and what unexpected idioms might be possible beyond those associations. The pink in Samantha Thomas's *Punk* bubbles up like joyful tar from underneath the weight of cliff-like passages of black paint. One black shape takes up the whole left third of the canvas and along its top edge across to the other side. Another splats and bleeds like an ink blot, resting inside a central square of hot red that is in turn bordered on the left and top by a thin edge of light pink separating the red from the surrounding black. The bottom is white, with ethereal red circles and the whole seems like a grotto or a slow-motion flood, painted with energy and movement and no shyness toward pigment; a total independence from form makes it plain that pink can hold its own with the big colors.

—Shana Nys Dambrot

Pink III closed in March at Arena 1, Santa Monica Fine Art Studios. Other artists in the exhibition were: Robert Acuña, Wendy Adest, Daniele Albright and Stefan Lawrence, Jimi Gleason, Carrie Jenkins, Katy Stone, Peter Wu, Rosha Yaghmai, and Almond Zigmund.

Shana Nys Dambrot is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

Amanda Ross-Ho at Cherry and Martin

Amanda Ross-Ho's newest exhibition, *Nothin Fuckin Matters*, has a depressingly apt title. In the artist's third solo show since graduation from University of Southern California in 2006, and the second at Cherry and Martin, Ross-Ho shows pieces from several bodies of work to varied effect. Ostensibly, the works are characterized by an obtuse, laissez-faire sensibility (appropriately so, given the title), but this malaise is punctuated by shades of something deeper and more resonant. *Mantle*, hidden away in the gallery's smaller back room, includes a black-and-white photograph of the world hung above a rectangle cut out from the wall. Flat ovals and a rough square are cut from sheetrock and arranged carefully across the top in a sort of blank plea, maybe for meaning. The cut-away rectangle in the wall forms an exposed wood dais that contrasts luminously with the neat, white rectangle of the photograph. With this oblique altar to modernism, Ross-Ho begins to complicate the subject of meaninglessness, provoking questions rather than complicity.

Large rectangles of white sheetrock lean against equally white walls like industrial monoliths. Photos and prints



Amanda Ross-Ho, *Sad Sack*, 2007, canvas dropcloth, sculpture remnants, at Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles. (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.)

hang on these with the orderly design of a department store sale, evoking the mix-and-match sensibility of Ross-Ho's practice; pieces can be bought individually or as an installation. While this flexibility may be good news for budget-conscious buyers, it generates a lack of completion more than any critique of commerce—the possibility of which falls flat within the context of the gallery. Several works utilize the tools of art, commenting on the process of making as related to art and to craft. A paint-splattered coat is on display and the flatbed scan of a marked-up cutting board is used in several pieces, its scratches enlarged on pale blue ground. The cut-away pages of crafting manuals are filled with the surface of the board. Indeed, a fascination with art versus arts-and-crafts permeates the exhibition, resonating more profoundly in pieces that are either hung individually on the sheetrock or cut directly from its surface. In *gran-abertura #2*, rough holes produce the pattern of a macramé design, complete with tassels. The conversion in scale and medium creates a curious rift, where craft pattern evolves alternately into rug, sculpture, altar or shadow play. In *White Goddess 3* (which is actually black), another macramé pattern shape is painted in canvas and hung on the sheetrock panel.

The most successful piece does not make use of sheetrock at all but rather forms a huge Oldenburgian art sack filled with the oversized trappings of an artist: Stretcher bars and red patterned frames (apparently these latter pieces are enlarged versions of Ross-Ho's past sculptures) sit together in a bag made to emulate one the artist carries. Playful and funny, *Sad Sack* incites a reflexive commentary that supersedes itself, embracing the broader implications of value and worth in relation to the inflation of identity (or the trappings thereof) as a means of self-preservation or awareness, a possi-

bility equal parts necessary and absurd, yet achingly human. While the exhibition achieves an interesting sort of malleability, overall, it lacks the purposeful verve of more committed pieces such as *Mantle* and *Sad Sack*. But underneath the clever manipulation and self-conscious art-world commentary lurks a deeper kind of questioning with an inviting sense of humor. Bits of day-to-day detritus are placed here and there behind rough holes cut in various pieces of sheet rock throughout the exhibition. One of these, a cat's water dish, lies empty in perhaps the most wry and curious nod to questions of meaning, malleability and purposefulness of all.

—Annie Buckley

Amanda Ross-Ho: *Nothin Fuckin Matters* closed in February at Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles.

Annie Buckley is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

Samantha Fields at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery

Samantha Fields's paintings at LightBox, all depicting monstrous storms, cover quite a lot of conceptual ground. They dust off old-fashioned (which is not to say obsolete) ideas of transcendentalism and the sublime—exemplified in the work of the Hudson River school painters of the mid-1800s—but suggest, too, apocalyptic visions of the future in which a compromised Earth is ravaged by hurricanes and twisters. Fields describes herself as an environmentalist; in a statement she writes that she feels a kinship with painters like Thomas Moran, who sought to preserve America's wilderness by helping to spearhead the National Parks movement.

The menacing skies depicted in *This Land*, Fields's first major solo exhibition, aren't imagined. She spent the summer of 2006 chasing storms in Nebraska, coming away with thousands of digital photographs. One painting might represent a composite of several different photos—she notes, for instance, that several of her Nebraska skies are paired with landscapes lifted from the Mojave Desert (most works in *This Land* include only a thin, darkened strip of earth). Global warming of course, threatens a similar type of transposition, introducing foreign weather to established ecosystems.

Fields's project seems straightforward enough—and in fact it might be a bit *too* straightforward if there were not something strikingly odd about these paintings. While you can imagine many painters approaching the subject of a violent storm with agitated brushwork, the surfaces of Fields's paintings are entirely without texture. Betraying not even a hint of a brushstroke, they reveal nothing of their process. A paper-thin layer of paint uniformly covers each canvas. Areas of color—gray, orange, blue, yellow, black—blend seamlessly, not overlapping so much as fusing together. Scrutinizing a painting at close range feels like gazing into fog: Your eye finds nothing definite to latch onto. But while the works in *This Land* lack a rich quality of surface, they are still seductive—luminous, evasive and atmospheric. As painted skies, they're extraordinarily convincing.

It turns out that Fields makes her paintings using a process she adapted from Japanese airbrushing techniques, meticulously layering mists of color in a way that leaves no trace of her hand. The end result is a matte, photo-like surface. While others have painted photo-realistic or photo-derived images as a means of commenting on the relationship between painting and photography, Fields's project seems less concerned with aesthetic theory and more concerned, in a way, with human psychology. After all, both painting and photography have been used as a means to capture what we see in the world and to re-present it on our own terms. But of course, replicating the way something looks, however faithfully, doesn't amount to comprehending it. Weather, for example, remains a chaotic system, impossible to predict very far in advance despite the use of high-tech instruments.

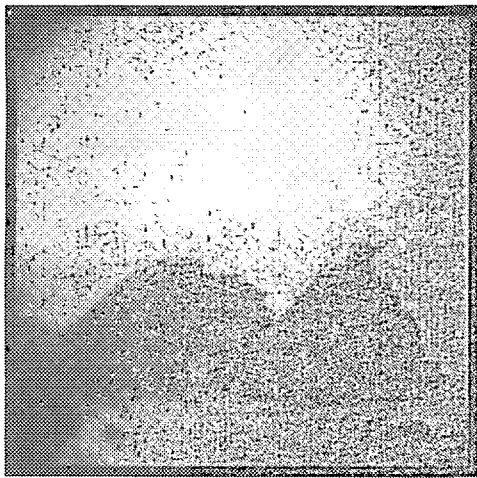
Viewed as a whole, Fields's process



Samantha Fields, *To Rain Upon the Earth (Colorado Plain)*, 2006, acrylic on canvas on panel, 48" x 72", at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery, Los Angeles.

embraces two extremes of human nature. On the one hand, her direct experience of these colossal storms (an act she describes as "essential" to her work) indulges a universal desire to peer over the brink of knowledge, to test the limits of our capabilities. On the other, her highly controlled method of translating

the storms into paint—a mute, still version of a formidable and uncontrollable event—fulfills an equally powerful human need to feel in control of whatever surrounds us.



Sean Higgins, *Last Island*, 2007, ink-jet print transfer, acrylic on Plexiglas, at sixspace, Los Angeles.

Shutting between these two poles, her process actually parallels Kant's notion of how we experience sublime events: First comes the stage of overwhelming awe, then comes the stage of rational recuperation. We take a naïve but necessary comfort in our mind's ability to assimilate such phenomena as catastrophic storms—then we manage, once again, to assert the superiority of our consciousness over our fundamentally incomprehensible environment.

—Katherine Satorius

Samantha Fields: *This Land* closed April 7 at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery, Los Angeles.

Katherine Satorius is a freelance writer based in Santa Monica.

Sean Higgins at sixspace

Sean Higgins's new work on view at sixspace is, in a word, transcendent. Impossible to categorize definitively as photography, painting or sculpture, the pieces draw both from photographs made by the artist and found images, likely appropriated from magazines. Higgins is resolutely vague when asked to identify his sources, as his work concentrates on a reevaluation of place, conjuring up new and purposefully unidentifiable topographies that exist outside of time.

Digitally printed images are transferred onto the back of hand-sanded Plexiglas sheets that range in size from 24-by-24 inches to 60-by-60 inches. The even, buffed surfaces devour the bright gallery lights with the intensity of black velvet, though the images and backgrounds themselves are predominantly pearlescent white. Like the impenetrable depths of clean, hard ice, Higgins's images are dangerously alluring. The gauzy effect of the sanded Plexiglas coupled with the indistinct print transfer process dares one to look closer, to attempt to discern the blurry details. *Valhalla*, an aerial perspective of a spring-green island in a sea of white, places these details perpetually out of reach. One can almost make out a rocky cliff or a grove of trees. But as quickly as it is

conjured, the image dissolves, making it more memory than reality. The viewer risks falling into these images: Attempts to bring them into focus draws one into a state of sublime vertigo.

Higgins enforces the mediated distance between the

viewer's focal plane and the image surface by mounting the prints on the verso side of the glass. The recognition of this remove nonetheless provokes a widening of the eyes, an effort to sharpen what can never be brought into focus. Like the difficulty of remembering a face, these images are delicately balanced on the edge of perception, like fragments of visual memories which can only be partially resurrected.

Though the technique is certainly stunning and unique, Higgins's work is much more than a simple exploration of creative media. The exhibition includes at least three distinct series within this larger body of work, including horizonless images of ocean waves, aerial views of unknown landmasses and angular icebergs. Though they are brought together by their representation in similar media, the images—from the actual subject matter depicted to its photographic representation—are all quite different. The show's title, *Island of Relative Stability*, refers to a group of physical elements that possess significantly longer half-lives than the surrounding elements on the periodic table. A comparison can be made between nuclear physics' reliance on geographic metaphor to visualize the movements of atomic particles points and a similar structuring principle in Higgins's *Island of Relative Stability*. He employs the metaphor in reverse, using images of monumental land formations to summon that most invisible aspect of the human psyche, the memory.

Even the worn edges, the grid of creases made by folding and re-folding a magazine page, are celebrated in Higgins's *Over the Essex and Winter Version*. In the former, a wall of stormy, deep cerulean blue water is divided into equal panes, thin white lines tracing the folds. Like a favorite travel brochure, weathered from months of admiring the coveted landscape, the image here—despite its ominous nature—is soft and care-worn. In *Winter Version*, which depicts a craggy island of rock and ice in black and white, the creases are most prominent at the bottom of the image and fade into the luminous white sky at the top, suggesting a favorite picture that has gradually supplanted the memory it represents.

Invoking the aura of singular works that have accumulated a history independent of their creators, Higgins's series

relays a belief that such physical histories are equally valuable in contributing to the power of art. Pictures may not only represent their makers' memories; indeed, pictures may have memories of their own.

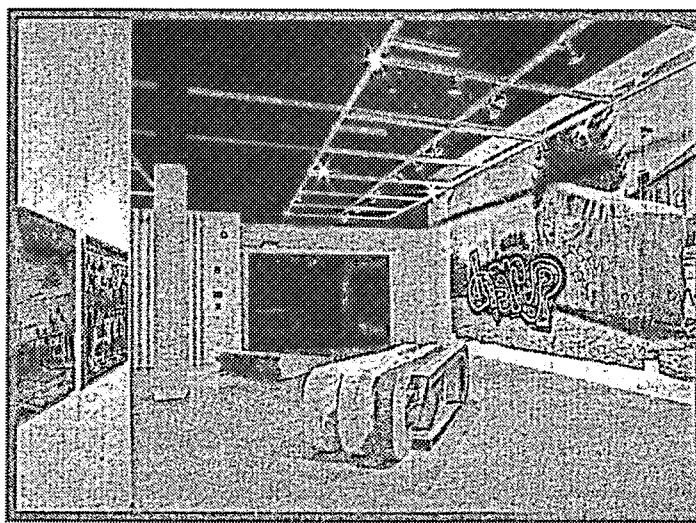
—Kim Beil

Sean Higgins: *Island of Relative Stability* closed in March at sixspace, Los Angeles.

Kim Beil is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

'The Trans-Aestheticization of Daily Life' at the Sweeney Art Gallery

Once upon a time, people escaped to Disneyland, an environment so obviously artificial that, by juxtaposition, it made the world outside seem real. Amusement park-goers traveled from all parts of the country—or globe for that matter—to wander through the utopian setting of Disneyland's Main Street, U.S.A. By way of repetition, branding, television campaigns and taking full advantage of American culture's cultivated romantic longing for a Mayberry-like reality, Disneyland—if only for a moment—became not only a destination but also a collective state of mind or a sort of cul-



Installation view, *Trans-aestheticization of Daily Life*, at the Sweeney Gallery, UC Riverside. (Photo: Jonathon Green.)

tural mask for the actual Main Streets beyond the "Happiest Place On Earth's" meticulously decorated walls. In the second half of the twentieth century, Disney's strategy was vigorously applied to other facets of culture, mainly malls and planned communities, and the underlying motivation was generally the

same: to reflect culture's perception of itself in order to attract a consumer base to a hyperreal environment in which subjectivity would become enmeshed with prescribed cultural consciousness driven by commerce. Universal City Walk, for example, is an amalgam of various bits of Americana in the form of shops and restaurants, and the open-air mall makes use of synthetic familiarity developed by the entertainment industry as a major draw. There is actually a chain of malls called City Place that can be found from coast to coast and these too have adopted the Main Street motif and generally house similar stores (Circuit City, Best Buy, Borders, etc). In Southern California, particularly in the Inland Empire, there are dozens of planned communities (often gated) that are developed around mall-like commercial zones disguised as "town centers." Unlike town centers of the past, which evolved naturally as communities grew, these new commercial centers either come first or are planned into the communities. Mom-and-Pop shops or corner coffee houses have been supplanted by Quizno's and Starbucks. Spontaneity, discovery and choice have been sacrificed as a result. In one way or another we all are familiar with—and relatively complicit in—this trend. What remains elusive in this urban condition is the role of art and subjectivity in developing cultural identity.

The Trans-Aestheticization of Daily Life, curated by Peter Zellner, brings together eight artists who examine the status, or condition, of art in an American society which seems increasingly devoid of a subjective cultural consciousness and has

fallen victim to the *commercial effect* in which all aspects of personal life are mediated. Unexpectedly, the exhibition does not convey a doomsday attitude that anticipates the death of individual expression in the face of the commercial juggernaut. Instead, this collection of work demonstrates a generally optimistic view that suggests art is, and

will always be, a necessity in developing and maintaining cultural identity.

Several artists present video installations, and this is fitting, given that the major driving force of commercial systems is television and film. Justin Beal's *Videotron* manipulates time and public space while re-appropriating commercial



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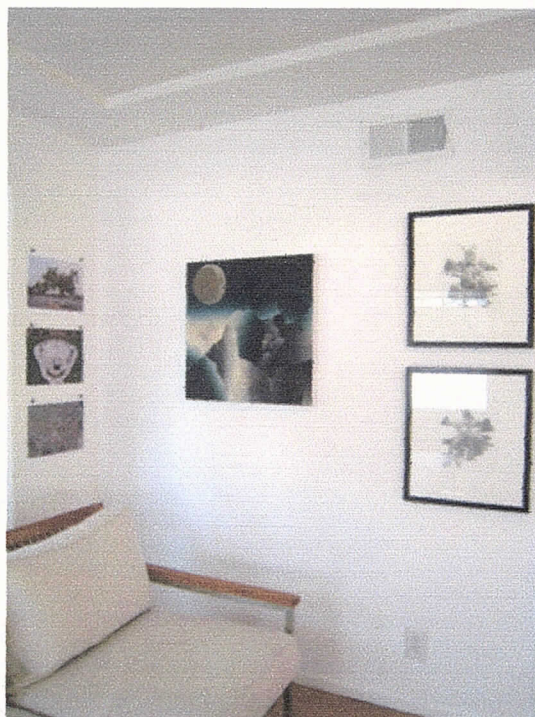
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Review: Tree Service



Review: Tree Service by Sasha Lee



Tree Service at domestic setting
Co-curated by Michael Gold and Jeanne Patterson

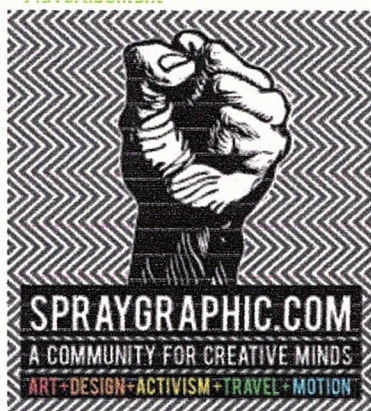
“Tree Service,” which opened July 12th and runs until August 9th, is a refreshing look at a motley crue of emerging contemporary artists who examine trees as ongoing aspects of their visual iconography. Turning towards the tree, an iconic popular culture symbol for nature as a whole or the environment (that oft-sited repository of hippie hugging) seems a particularly apt subject of investigation in the concrete, strip mall parking lot that is Los Angeles. Turning to this archaic, ancient symbol and the myriad ways it has been interpreted and employed within visual culture was an interesting thematic thread.

For those unfamiliar with domestic setting, the space, as the name implies, is an alternative live/work space directed by Jeanne Patterson. The more casual approach

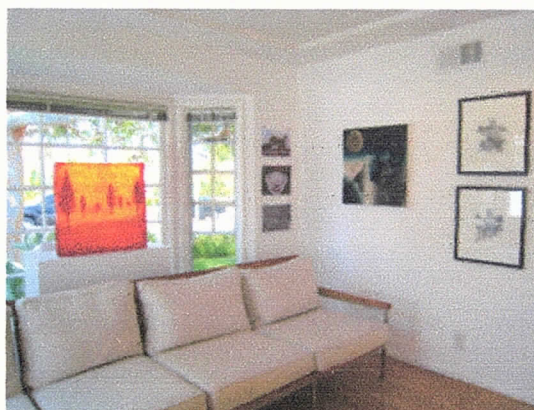
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to exhibiting art work contrasts the ice blast formality of standard stiffly staffed institutional spaces. Rather than being greeted by an indifferent gallerina and made to shuffle through the space in reverent, hushed tones, the brightly lit domestic setting is as comfortable as visiting a neighbor. A neighbor who happens to have great artwork on the walls, anyway. I am instantly reminded of the Modernist's seminal experimental museum of the Societe Anonyme, that brownstone on East 47th street that housed work from the late greats of art history, Duchamp, Man Ray, Paul Klee. Patterson is definitely on to something —being able to feel at ease while perusing works is a definite boon.

As far as the works exhibited, there was a wide net of media exhibited and breadth of expression. Standouts included Eric Beltz's beautifully rendered "high definition" drawings that ironically recontextualize and complicate a motley crue of symbols, histories, texts, icons and ideas. His visual language spans everything from the aesthetics of graphic novels and Audobon botanical illustrations, re-appropriated historical figures such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, astral new age iconography, texts relating to visions and dreams, and a cascade of quirky and fascinating self-invented philosophies and realizations.

Also compelling was Jessica Swanson's abstracted environments that presented micro/cosmic fantastical realms. Her fabricated realities were one part fairy tale illustration and evoked a sincere sense of play and imagination. Upon further inspection these self-contained worlds are dotted with tiny detail; miniature pine trees, howling wolves, almost indistinguishable plants.

Samantha Fields created small-scale square paintings that document natural catastrophes —storms, fires, and the like. Fields daringly seeks out these feats of nature and airbrushes her impressions of the events. Her Turner-esque interpretations appear almost as soft focus photographs and demonstrate a beautiful sense of light and color.



Drew Dominick created a hilariously performative video piece entitled "Maine." The artist dressed in camouflage fatigues and postured in a tall tree, shooting bows and arrows at the camera. The act was sort of a balletic, ridiculous little boy fantasy turned reality.



Jared Pankin created wondrously off-kilter creations, fusing sculptural precedents with more craft-oriented fabricated skills, ranging from modeling to set decoration. Appearing as school project dioramas blown up to bizarre proportions, his creations evoke the ramshackle charm of houses built by hand.

There were a number of other outstanding works—also included in the show was Nick Agid, Joe Biel, Portia Hein, Wendy Heldmann, Laura Hull, Siobhan McClure & Greg Rose, Timothy Nolan, Stas Orlovski, Pam Posey, Bill Radawec, Lucas Reiner, Sharon Ryan, Rena Small, Joel Tauber, Daniel Wheeler, Megan Williams and Andre Yi. Be sure to check out this show before it comes down.



Domestic setting is open Fridays and Saturdays from 12 to 5pm and by appointment.

3774 Stewart Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90066
310.391.8023

Image Credits:

Installation Shot

Jared Pankin
Little Big Tree 2008
wood, foam, acrylic paint

Installation Shot

Installation Shot

Installation Shot

painted in muted neutrals), and swirling scroll-like forms suggestive of water, wind, dragons, and time's vicissitudes; eternity pervades temporality. Through June 28 at **Traywick Contemporary** (895 Colusa Ave., Berkeley). Traywick.com or 510-527-1214.

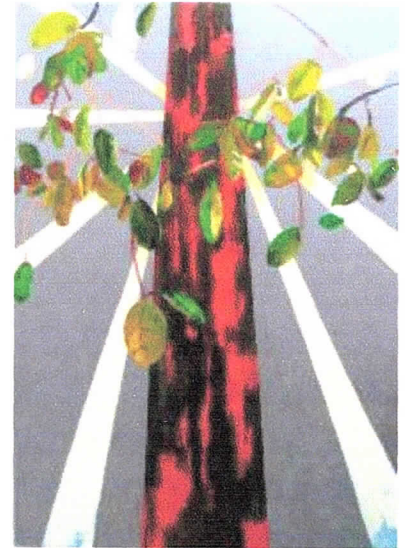
The Nature of LA

Four southerners ponder the human condition.

By DeWitt Cheng

May 7, 2008

We Bay Area chauvinists occasionally feel the need to compare the Best Place on Earth to NYC or LA, nice places to visit, certainly, but somehow (sniff) unsuitable. There's finicky regional essentialism in our art world, too, painting LA as the Other: our shallow, giddy dark side, the antipodean land of *the 101* and *the 5*. In reality, however, regional style in this digital age global art market is pretty much extinct; the art map for better or worse has no center(s). In *The Nature of LA*, Angelenos **Samantha Fields**, **Portia Hein**, **Stas Orlovski**, and **Andre Yi** examine our human condition, within and apart from nature, in universal, metaphorical terms, from their diffuse, suburban, austral megalopolis.



Portia Hein's "Untitled (08 01)"

Fields' airbrushed acrylics of opulent but menacing skies derive from her adventures in Midwestern photographic storm-chasing. An ardent environmentalist, she sees her synthesized but convincing skyscapes — roiling, furrowed, knotted clouds set above shards of silhouetted terrain, or enveloping tiny airplanes or helicopters — as falling within the Hudson River School of moralized transcendentalist landscape, embodying messages for us latter-day materialists: awe at nature's might, and awfulness for what we have wrought and brought on ourselves. Hein's untitled oil and watercolors look at nature from an environmental angle as well (she cites John Muir as an influence), but, with their simplified drawing, reduced palette, use of collaged elements, and air of reconstruction based on memory, they're iconic, symbolic depictions of the landscape as a force for renewal and growth; her trees are vaguely anthropomorphic, and her rays of sunlight something more than just scenic optical effects; nature's our last best hope. Orlovski's mixed-media works draw on a wide range of imagery to explore the recontextualization of fragments; in "Sculpture with Butterflies," a pedestal holding a toppled marble woman's head stands amid shattered torsos and legs while butterflies, metaphors for metamorphosis, alight and flutter. Orlovski's recurring birds, moons, fragmented architecture, and scale disjunctures recall Cornell and Ernst, who also mined the past, respectively (but not respectfully), for poetic nostalgia and philosophical subversion. Yi draws the abandoned mining infrastructure of the American West — mines, sheds, etc. — in a style combining detailed Western realism with Eastern orthogonal perspective, infinite space (though here

painted in muted neutrals), and swirling scroll-like forms suggestive of water, wind, dragons, and time's vicissitudes; eternity pervades temporality. Through June 28 at **Traywick Contemporary** (895 Colusa Ave., Berkeley). Traywick.com or 510-527-1214.



Shana Nys Dambrot, Contributor

Art critic, curator, essayist based in LA

The Reality of Nature

09/09/2017 02:10 pm ET



The Reality of Nature, installation view. L to R: Andrea Bersaglieri, Marie Thibeault, Samantha Fields

Nature is a temple in which living columns sometimes emit confused words. Man approaches it through forests of symbols, which observe him with familiar glances. — Charles Baudelaire

The Reality of Nature is that it is not always the nurturing, restorative, spiritual, user-friendly place one imagines; nor is it the heroic antidote to civilization as fetishized by our self-critically urbane society. It is not only mankind's victim but also its source and master. It is full of wonder. It loves its children but it takes its revenge. This group of 13 artists working in painting, photography, drawing, as well as quasi-sculptural and saliently hybrid mediums, each takes the real world mess and muddle into account, using both experience and concept to explore the conflicts and confluences between what we want and what we have when it comes to living in a world the belongs to both Man and Nature.



Constance Mallinson

Where many seek out and embrace the enduring beauty, majesty and intimate details in the forms of its flora and fauna, its skies, ice, storms, and sunsets, others take an approach of critique and caution, using industrial materials or depicting the dire consequences of humanity's subjugation of nature. With motifs culled from sources in architecture and wilderness, science and science fiction, resource scarcity, pollution, evolution, tenacious adaptation, and sublime phenomenology, this timely, even urgent, exhibition uses visual art's capacity for solving paradox and imaging the impossible to demonstrate frameworks for changing the adversarial dynamic to one of cooperation and humility. Ultimately, a battle against nature is not only one mankind cannot truly win, but one not at all worth waging.



Jennifer Gunlock

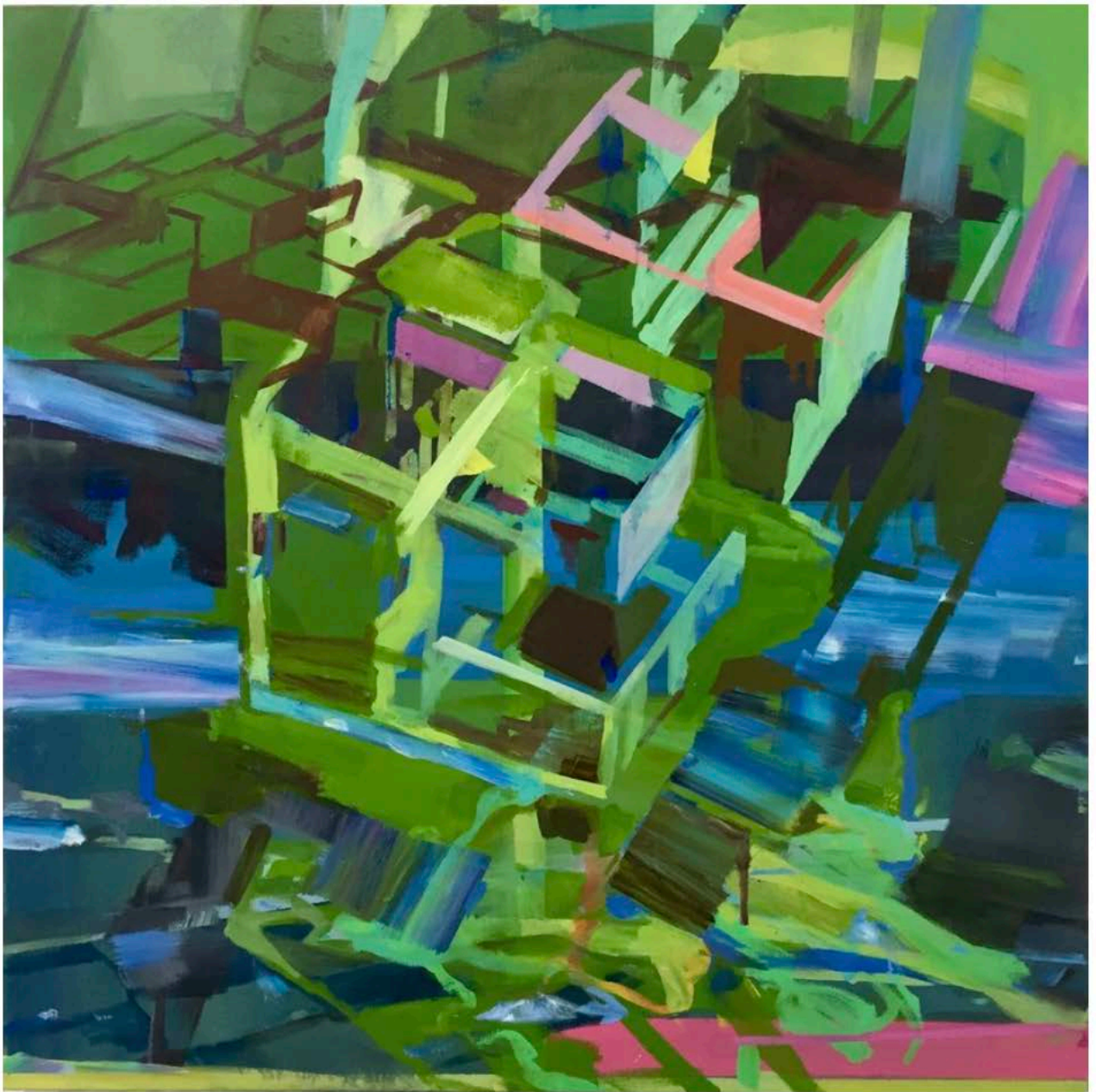
These artists have been brought together thematically rather than stylistically; and while they all take the landscape idiom as a starting point, none of them take it for granted. Each has formulated an approach to the genre which embodies the complexities and contradictions of the situation. It appears that all of them have incorporated dissonance into their aesthetic, each of them has made artwork that speaks to the unsettled, unprecedented, untenable ecological moment. Andrea Bersaglieri uses a visual language of classical Victorian-era botanical illustration, but uses it to depict and chronicle the boring, invasive plant life that survives the frustration of a suburb. Catherine Ruane masterfully renders plants that, once non-native, somehow rallied and adapted — flourished even — where once they didn't belong at all. Terry Arena uses the topic of the bee population as both an activist engagement and an artistic allegory of creation, destruction, interdependency, quality of attention, scale and duration, fragility, and urgency. Constance Mallinson paints beautifully rendered images of trash and litter in the landscape, detritus whose disposable attractiveness makes plain the viewer's complicity in the appetite for empty calories.

Devon Tsuno is known for paintings and architectural installations made of variations on abstracted water motifs that eschew naturalism in both geometrical structure and unconventional palette — and yet somehow trigger clear thoughts about water and how we use it. Hint: not very well. Erika Lizée’s dimensional trompe l’oeil asks fundamental questions about what is to be considered natural. Her imagery posits unknown life forms and unseen dimensions, leveraging humanity’s capacity for wonder and terror to remind us of how much we don’t know about the cosmos. Samantha Fields belongs to a rich tradition of allegorical landscape painting, in which environmental disasters are rendered in a matter-of-fact tone that speaks to the inevitability of danger and death. Her newest work uses that same pictorial existentialism to look at other kinds of discomfort and marvel, for example the relationship of spaceflight to life on earth. Steve Seleska manipulates the materials and aesthetic of pollution and decay, devising the interaction of industrial and natural substances to create topographical and fractal mixed media works that somehow embody the forces of both destruction and creation.



Samantha Fields

Jennifer Gunlock examines the allegorical framework of humanity's impositions on the environment in ambitious mixed media works that explore our heavily mediated perceptions of the natural world, by literally building schematic environments out of wood, drawings, photographs, plastics and etc. that express the contradictions between our playful romanticization of nature and the trouble it's really in. Jeanne Dunn's radiant portraits of trees in the forest have dark sides too. In her view a forest is a place for getting lost, for the pleasures and terrors of being alone. Marie Thibeault takes a feral view of architectural entropy, deconstructing scenarios which seem to take a verdant glee in Man's eventual disappearance; structurally it's decaying but optically it's vibrant. Virginia Katz depicts her experience of nature in a pure language of abstraction. For her, nature is not landscape, but rather the relational dynamics of abstract visual forces; an experience to evoke rather than an appearance to describe. J.J. L'Heureux initially traveled to Antarctica to photograph the patterns of ice and snow as source material for a series of abstract paintings, subsequently expanding her project to include photography directly. The photos look painterly and abstract, which deepens and lengthens the attention of the viewer, satisfying her goals as both an artist and an activist. In the words of Marc Chagall, "Great art picks up where nature ends."



Marie Thibeault

Curated by Kristine Schomaker, [The Reality of Nature](#) opens Saturday, September 9 at [LAUNCH LA](#), 6-9pm, and continues through September 30, 2017.

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Eden Is Burning:

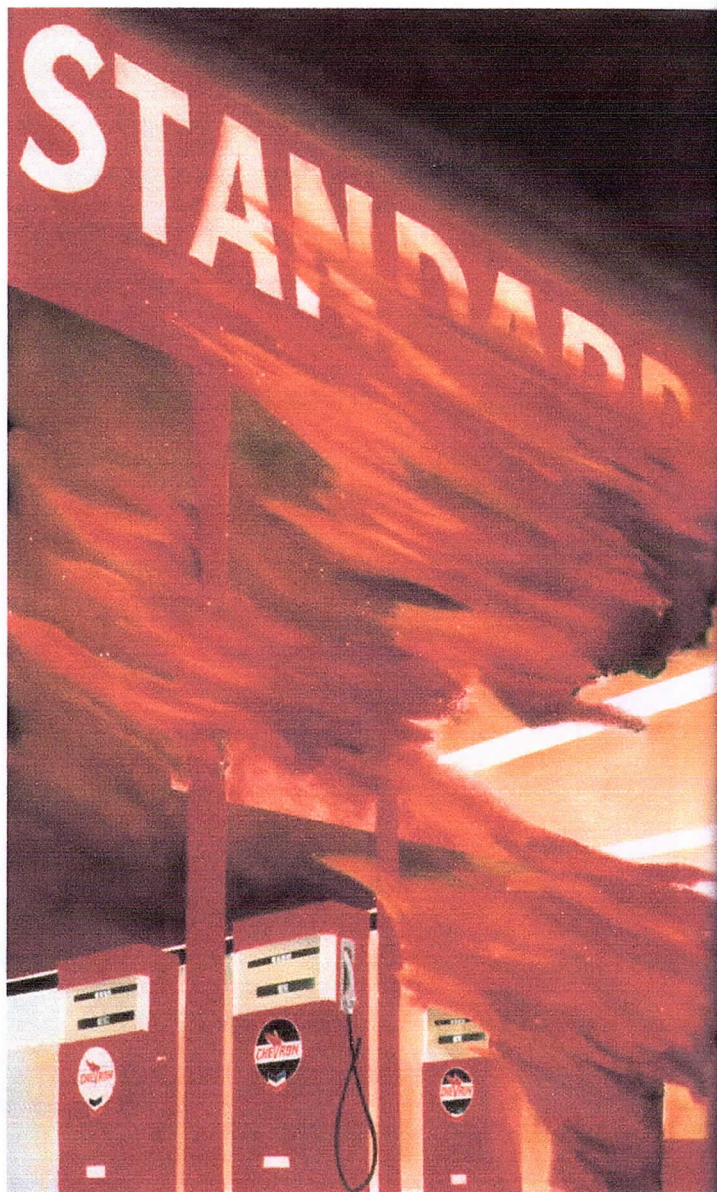
Flirting with disaster, contemporary painters are finding beauty and anxiety - and perhaps the sublime—in an out-of-control nature

By George Melrod

Born in London in 1775, the fabled British Romantic painter Joseph Mallord William Turner never had a chance to visit the rugged wilds of California before his death, in Chelsea, in 1851. Most likely the thought never crossed his mind, occupied as he was with his raging seascapes and brilliant British landscapes and rich Venetian vistas, all saturated with light in a way that would be forever associated with his artistry. However, one can't help feeling, over a century and a half after his death, that if somehow he could make the leap through time and space to pay a visit to the Golden State, he might feel quite inspired. If ever there was a painter who derived stimulation from the violent grandeur and drama of the natural world—fire, fog, storms, snow, and sunsets, as well as more destructive catastrophes—it was Turner, and if ever there was an American landscape worthy of Turner's theatrical, ephemeral craft, it is California. While the vision of Turner's golden afternoon sunlight radiating from behind the local mini-mall or Pizza Hut might make for severe indigestion, anyone who's tried to drive from Southern to Northern California on the 5 via the Grapevine Pass in a mid-winter blizzard would surely feel at home in Turner's 1812 depiction of *Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* during a snowstorm. Perhaps the artist might enjoy grappling with a tangerine dreamy, smog-saturated SoCal sunset over our own dainty marinas or Venetian canals. Or soak up the dramatic rains, fog, mudslides, or (thankfully less frequent) earthquakes. And then, of course, there's the fires ...

Today, in many ways, we are living in a Turner-esque world. As global warming continues to impact our meteorological global ecosystem, and the subject of natural disaster continues ever more to permeate the public consciousness, contemporary artists are increasingly engaged with negotiating humanity's relationship to its troubled landscape. And toward that end, a subset of California painters seem to have picked up on some distinctly Turner-esque themes.

One of Turner's themes is an elucidation of the concept of the sublime. Although prominently bandied around by such 18th- and 19th-century British writers as Edmund Burke and John Ruskin, the exact definition of "the sublime" in landscape art remains fluid. Burke made a distinction between the sublime and the (merely) beautiful, noting that the "beautiful" tends to be small, smooth, light, delicate and generally unthreatening, whereas the "sublime" tends to be vast



"BURNING GAS STATION," 1966
Ed Ruscha
OIL ON CANVAS, 20½" x 39"
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

in scale, massive, dark, gloomy, or obscure, provoking fear or terror, contemplation of danger, or other thoughts or feelings that might elevate the mind of the beholder. Ruskin, by contrast, did not find beauty and the sublime to be mutually exclusive, although he too felt that greatness in scale was a central part of the equation; rather his approach to landscape trumpeted a faithful depiction of nature, through use of formal and textural nuance that was true to its natural subject.

Tellingly, when it came to their depictions of the natural landscapes of North America, the Hudson River School painters of the 19th century were also informed by a sense of the sublime, portraying the great vistas of the American panorama as a lush, untamed Eden. Painters such as Thomas Cole (1801-1848), his protégé Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900), Thomas Moran (1837-1926), and others, captured the wilderness of the American continent just at the moment it was being tamed by the westward onslaught of immigrants, industry, and railroads; their vast illusionistic canvases presented idealized visions that were steeped in a profound sense of the sacred, and successfully branded the American landscape for generations. (Created in the age before cinema, one might say they were the equivalent of a 3-D "Avatar" for their generation). That sense of the West, and in particular, California, as a rugged, unspoiled Arcadia continued well into the 20th century, with photographers such as Ansel Adams, modernist painters such as Arthur B. Davies, as well as many lesser plein air painters eager to celebrate the natural beauty, if not necessarily the harsh sublimity, of the Pacific Coast Parnassus.

It all gets so pretty that it is almost a relief to jump ahead to Ed Ruscha in the 1960s. By now, the conflicts underlying modern culture and the would-be Californian Arcadia are being exposed in a new form of Pop landscape painting, through vernacular imagery, bold colorful graphics, and that ubiquitous Southern California threat of fire. In fact, several of Ruscha's iconic landmarks get set on fire in his works: there is Norms on La Cienega, a Standard station, of course, and memorably, the original high modernist campus of LACMA. Yet even in Ruscha's other works, his Standard station and Fat Boy building (warehouse? diner? auto repair shop?) appear with acrid yellow or lusty orange hues hovering behind them: evocative of a stunning, smog-infused sunset or the implicit threat of glowing fire looming just over the (chronological) horizon. While these works are certainly captivating, they are, in Burkean terms, sublime—that is, frightening, eerie, obscure, gloomy, and compelling—not beautiful in the unthreatening sense at all.

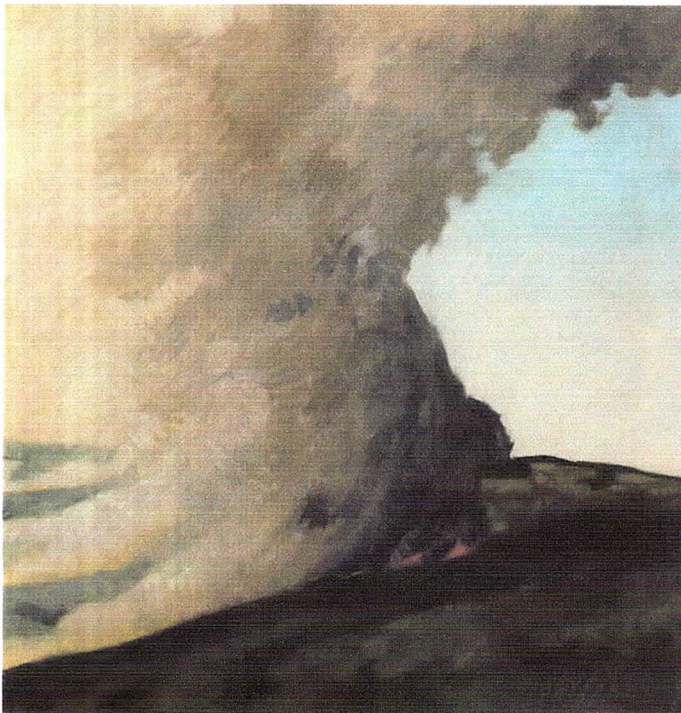
If scary is sublime, we have clearly entered a rather sublime century. With natural cataclysms from tsunamis to Katrina reminding us ever more forcefully of our global vulnerability, and more locally, one devastating, record-setting fire after another topping headlines in Southern California, it is little wonder that such disasters have influenced the lexicon of contemporary artists. In particular, one can point to several painters who have found a visceral muse in the region's fires. While perhaps missing the acid wit of Ruscha or the spirituality of Turner (who still found time to document the burning of the houses





of parliament in 1834), they nonetheless mark a bracing update to the gauzy Edenic language of previous generations of U.S. landscape painters. But they also represent a striking reflection on the reality of living in a moment and geography dominated by natural forces which seem to be careening ever further out of control.

Intriguingly, Los Angeles painter Samantha Fields was inspired by the paintings of the Hudson River School from an early age: in particular, a large 1860 landscape by Frederick Edwin Church called *Twilight in the Wilderness*, on view at the Cleveland Museum of Art, in the city where she was raised. Featuring thick, dark grey and salmon clouds over a lemon yellow sunset and a dark, wooded lake and rolling hills, it is an aptly brooding landscape, and helped inspire her to pursue art; after studying at Cranbrook, Fields moved to LA in 1999 to teach at Cal State Northridge. Nature gone amok seems to be Fields' special obsession. Her unsettling paintings of brightly colorful mutant animals in the early 2000s gave way in 2005-06 to a renewed interest in the Hudson River painters. After a period of studying the harsh weather in the rain-soaked hills of LA, and the inland California deserts, she took a residency in Nebraska's "Tornado Alley" and documented the funnel clouds and thick looming thunderheads, and dramatic skies and lighting effects, in a series of paintings that she showed in 2007. With their churning clouds and roiling skies, the works are very much about the force of elemental nature; with fauna, flora and even the land itself almost excluded, they could almost be depictions of an alien planet.



Fields' recent, knockout show at Kim Light/Lightbox Gallery in Culver City, titled "Containment" (which ran November 7 - December 19, 2009), showed the artist pushing forward her craft—and her investigation of natural disaster—to a whole new level. Coincidentally or not, the show opened less than two months after the devastating Station Fire ravaged a vast swath of the Angeles National Forest north of La Canada Flintridge (and in doing so, set up conditions for the violent mudslides that afflicted those communities over the winter). The show's title refers to a phrase that has become all too common to Californians living in fire-prone zones: that is, the level to which a wildfire has been enclosed and controlled. As such, it suggests the inherent conflict between humanity and the natural forces it seeks to hold back; rather than just depicting these elemental forces in themselves, it implies a battle line wherein humans must confront and rein in the power of nature in extremis. Yet although the subject depicted is vast in scale, the works in the show—with the exception of one large painting—are quite petite: only six inches square; the exhibition featured nearly a hundred works, arranged around the small gallery space in a grid-like band three paintings high. This contrast—between the vast, frightening, murky, elemental subject depicted (i.e., the sublime aspect, à la Burke) and the almost delicate beauty of the visions engendered—charges her works with a powerful frisson. Each one feels like a tiny glimpse into the grand arena of man vs. an out-of-control nature; set together, they could be various angles and stills from a riveting documentary.



Top:
"CONTAINMENT #26"
2009

Samantha Fields
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
6" X 6"

PHOTO: ED GLENNING, COURTESY KIM LIGHT/LIGHTBOX

"GAP FIRE, DAY ONE"
2009

Nicole Strasburg
OIL ON BIRCH PANEL, 24" X 24"
PHOTO: COURTESY SULLIVAN GOSS

"WILDFIRE"
2009

Nathan Abels
ACRYLIC ON PANEL, 40" X 60"
PHOTO: COURTESY OF RULE GALLERY

Fields' singular technique—a refined airbrush of acrylic on canvas, accented with occasional elements of brushwork—lends the works a singularly evocative and atmospheric texture, one that Ruskin, and perhaps even Turner, would appreciate. Although each view is unique, most involve the intersection of land, sky, fire and smoke. In *Containment #11* or *Containment #26*, a line of glowing fire works

If the Hudson River painters painted, in part, to raise an alarm against the encroaching forces of industry and humanity, then in a sense Fields is working from a similar stance, if far later in the battle, warning against the forces of global warming and a nature made increasingly virulent in part from our own human intervention. Quoted in her exhibition catalogue, she explains: "I travel the same road as

If scary is sublime, we have clearly entered a rather sublime century. With natural cataclysms from tsunamis to Katrina reminding us ever more forcefully of our global vulnerability, and more locally, one devastating, record-setting fire after another topping headlines in Southern California, it is little wonder that such disasters have influenced the lexicon of contemporary artists.

its way across rolling hillsides, amid clumps of vegetation, as thick white smoke rises upward, obscuring the view. In *Containment #10*, the orb of the sun burns through an acrid skyscape, above a dark sliver of silhouetted ground, the fire itself revealed only through its gorgeous/noxious effects. Others works also cloak the fire to emphasize sooty clouds of smoke. In some, like *Containment #16* or *Containment #28*, the fire weaves its way through the center of the frame in menacing, serpentine loops. In *Containment #5*, we see a rare human presence, in the silhouette of a helicopter, seemingly as inconsequential as a mosquito against the plumes of white and gray smoke, like a still from a modern-day firefighter's "Apocalypse Now." And yet, we see no fire in that image. Perhaps in that one, nature has been contained, for now.

the Hudson River School painters, and paint these scenes for a similar reason, to inspire awe in the face of planetary destruction. I paint the beauty within the disaster."

Another California painter who has found a convincing muse in the state's fires is Santa Barbara painter Nicole Strasburg. Santa Barbara, of course, has suffered its own terrible fires in recent years, including two significant fires in 2008, the Gap Fire, in July, in Goleta, which burned over 8,350 acres, and the Montecito Tea Fire, which burned nearly 2,000 acres in November, tearing through some very pricey real estate and destroying 210 homes. Strasburg, who works

"FIRST MEADOW LARK," 2010, James Lavadour
OIL ON PANEL, 48" X 60"
PHOTO: COURTESY OF PDX GALLERY





"THE BURNING OF THE HOUSES OF LORDS AND COMMONS, OCTOBER 16," 1834
Joseph Mallord William Turner
 OIL ON CANVAS, 36¼" X 48½"
 THE JOHN HOWARD MCFADDEN COLLECTION, 1928
 PHOTO: COURTESY PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

out of the more staid tradition of landscape painting, locates the fires within the range of elemental forces inherent to nature. Thus, her autumn 2009 show at Sullivan Goss Gallery, entitled "Air, Earth, Fire, Water," placed her fire paintings among a larger series of works featuring imagery of clouds and waves. In some paintings, the licking flames of fire suggest golden fields of grass, curls of dried brush, or the dynamism of ocean waves. In others, they are ferocious masses of orange and yellow, made all the more dramatic by their contrast to dark backgrounds, or the artist's vigorous brushstrokes. In several of these works, such as *Gap Fire*, *Day One* or *Omen*, the fire is indicated only by its ominous plumes of smoke. As destructive as they are, her fires represent a dynamic transformative energy that is as much as a part of nature as the vegetation they feed on, or the water, clouds and earth that frame them.

Taking an opposite approach, LA-based painter Marina Moevs creates stylized realist paintings of natural and human landscapes, often in the wake of cryptic disasters. Floods, fogs and fires tend to predominate. Several of her works depict splintered two-by-fours floating in gently rippling waves; in others, the interior of homes are shown flooded or in ruins. In *Fire IV* (2007), a row of homes is shown both flooded and on fire, the flames and smoke reflected with eerie calm in the water in the foreground. In *Smoke* (2008J49), a home perches at the edge of row of trees in the background, saturated by a glowing yellow and orange light amid a delicate film of smoke. Presented in vertical rectangular formats, her works are almost windows, directing the viewer into haunting landscapes that appear redolent with danger and the evidence of nature's potency.

James Lavadour, an abstract painter of mixed Native American descent, based in northeast Oregon, approaches landscape through his own dynamic, expressionistic language. In recent paintings like *Red* and *First Meadow Lark*, the slashing swatches of yellow, orange and red clearly indicate fire, but more than that they present an experiential sense of what a forest fire feels like. Yet Lavadour's use of fire as a subject has nothing to do with Biblical iconography of burning Edens or an encroaching threat to human society, rather it seems as much an essential part of nature as the colors he employs are essential to the spectrum.

"SMOKE"
 2008

Marina Moevs

OIL ON CANVAS, 50" X 32"

PHOTO: COURTESY KOPLIN DEL RIO GALLERY

Denver artist Nathan Abels paints cryptic scenes deconstructing the interstices of natural and human habitation, where mysterious wilderness intersects with quotidian society. Hints of danger abound. In his painting *Wildfire* (2009), from his current show at Denver's Rule Gallery, lines and licks of flame rise in an ink-black nighttime landscape, as the stark white beacon of the moon illuminates gusts of wafting smoke. In its eerie spectacle, nature has co-opted humanity in its nighttime light show; from what we see, it is hard to tell whether the fire is burning in a desolate tract or if the specks of light indicate a neighborhood in peril. The fire merely *is*, and all we can do is watch and wonder.

As evidenced by this small cross-section of contemporary painters, the subject of wildfire can be addressed through a wide spectrum of a vantage points: as a violent but vital extension of the forces of nature or a threat to human society; as the symbol of a human-influenced, globally warmed nature gone amok, or of the Edenic ideal of western landscape set aflame. If only from an ecological and art historical point of view, these last interpretations are particularly loaded. As societies around the globe continue to reap the whirlwind of destruction from extreme weather, global warming, pollution, and other, more direct planetary depredations, such themes will only grow more prominent in artistic discourse. That these visions are at once anxious and frightening, beautiful and sublime, is no contradiction. Mother Nature has many faces. Some of them are angry. As these artists point out, it's best to get used to what that aspect looks like, to stand back and contemplate its sublime ferocity. It won't be going away any time soon.





A BIG IMPORTANT ART BOOK (NOW WITH WOMEN)

Profiles of Unstoppable Female Artists--and Projects to Help You Become One

by **Danielle Krysa**

Celebrate 45 women artists, and gain inspiration for your own practice, with this beautiful exploration of contemporary creators from the founder of The Jealous Curator.

Walk into any museum, or open any art book, and you'll probably be left wondering: where are all the women artists? *A Big Important Art Book (Now with Women)* offers an exciting alternative to this male-dominated art world, showcasing the work of dozens of contemporary women artists alongside creative prompts that will bring out the artist in anyone!

This beautiful book energizes and empowers women, both artists and amateurs alike, by providing them with projects and galvanizing stories to ignite their creative fires. Each chapter leads with an assignment that taps into the inner artist, pushing the reader to make exciting new work and blaze her own artistic trail. Interviews, images, and stories from contemporary women artists at the top of their game provide added inspiration, and historical spotlights on art “herstory” tie in the work of pioneering women from the past. With a stunning, gift-forward package and just the right amount of pop culture-infused feminism, this book is sure to capture the imaginations of aspiring women artists.

Genre: **Nonfiction / Art / History / Contemporary (1945-)**

On Sale: October
2nd 2018

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(CAD)

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320

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9780762463794

truth of the man's various character. What he discovers instead is the truth of the image, which in this case is no less significant.

There are six large, monochromatic oil paintings in the show, as well as several bust-size ceramic works. Each portrays the leader at a different period in his life, usually with some element of manipulation or distortion. Gerhard Richter is an obvious influence on the paintings, and although Yin's Zhaoyang's technique falls well short of Richter's profound precision, it carries a persuasive emotional resonance.

"I," an 8-by-6-foot painting rendered in shades of vivid indigo, is based on a famous 1936 photograph of Mao as a young, handsome revolutionary. In one example of the show's deep personal undercurrent, however,

and slack-jawed, his vague gaze suggesting a Lear-like disintegration of majesty.

The gray-toned "Swimming" captures an aging Mao awkwardly mid-stroke, looking pitifully — but also endearingly — human and vulnerable. And "Passed Away" — an 8-by-8-foot canvas, rendered in an unusually thick application of brilliant Communist red — presents the leader at last on his deathbed, his ultimate mortality confirmed.

In the ceramic works, Yin Zhaoyang subjects several of the same images to fun-house-like distortions: dramatically elongating the body or comically compacting it; shrinking the head or tilting it unnaturally to the side. They're elegant objects, with smooth, lustrous surfaces and rich red, black and white

Hip, without forgoing tradition

In the au courant climate of South La Cienega Boulevard, the pair of exhibitions now at Kim Light / LightBox have an anomalously — and appealingly — old school air, with contemporary concerns grounded in decidedly traditional methods.

The two front galleries contain the paintings of **Samantha Fields**: dramatic skiescapes rendered in meticulous airbrush on mid-sized canvas-covered panels. Fields gathered the images with a camera — storms, fires, sunsets and spectacular cloud formations encountered on a re-

[See Galleries, Page E21]



JOSHUA WHITE Kim Light / LightBox Gallery

DRAMATIC SKYSCAPE: Samantha Fields' meticulous paintings, including "Destroy the Destroyers (Cedar City, UT)," are on exhibit at Kim Light / LightBox.



ADAM SILVERMAN
Kim Light / LightBox Gallery

CERAMIC: *Adam Silverman combines clean, traditional forms with rich glazes.*

[Galleries, from Page E20] cent cross-country trip — and reproduces them with lush, photographic accuracy, exploring the romantic tradition of the sublime as well as contemporary fears of environmental apocalypse.

Whether the works go so far as to “catapult landscape painting beyond the rehashing of art historical styles,” as the news release suggests, is questionable — if anything, the thinness of the airbrush inspires nostalgia for the rich, choppy surfaces of a Constable or a Turner — but they’re gorgeous paintings nonetheless.

Equally rousing though far more modest in scale are the ceramic works of **Adam Silverman**, in the project room and back office. The roughly two dozen vessels, the largest of which is no bigger than a basketball, combine clean, thin-walled, traditional forms — round with a narrow neck or columnar — with thick, expressive, richly organic glazes.

The craftsmanship is exquisite. Some have smooth, dark surfaces, with pale drips running across at unexpected angles. Others have rough, crusted surfaces, resembling dried foam. Others — my favorite — are clean, elegant, matte gray vessels partially coated with a lumpy, earthy, glossy, green-brown glaze, thick enough to



BY DESIGN: *Steve Gorman mixes images that are easy to recognize.*

serve as a sculptural element in itself. The contrast between the high refinement of the vessels’ lines and the mad unruliness of the glaze brings two opposing veins of ceramic practice into a masterful and deeply absorbing balance.

Kim Light / LightBox, 2856 S. La Cienega Blvd., Los Angeles, (310) 558-1111, through April 7. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lightbox.io

Enlivened by graphic mastery

Steve Gorman brings a lively graphic sensibility to a rather tired handful of themes in “Learned Helplessness,” an exhibi-

NO DIRECTION HOME

BY TULSA KINNEY

Griffith Park burning was a force of nature... and a stroke of luck for Samantha Fields. It isn't hard to imagine billows of smoky oranges, grays and blues as being beautiful and stunning. A magnificent tragedy. These "landscapes" are what draw Fields in with their formidable foreboding. She captures these calamities in her Romantic style of painting, modernizing the movement with her airbrush gun. Ever since Fields moved from the midwest to Los Angeles, she's been hunting firestorms (since we don't have "weather" here in Southern California).

Free money is why Kasper Kovitz came here to LA from Austria — specifically grant money. The weather too, he would tell you, and also "don't leave your tools outside" — a lesson he learned the same day he discovered sunny California and his missing tools. Kovitz mainly chases time now as an artist. He works the blue-collar end of the art world, traveling to art fairs around the world to hang artwork. He does this to buy time to make art in his Hollywood studio.

Pennsylvania homegrown Michael Dee has lugged his videos back and forth between NY and LA a couple of times now. Parties that you can throw for under \$300 are definitely a plus and essential to this LA transplant. Dee entered college as an Aerospace Tech major at Kent State in Ohio, and ended up with a MFA. He's been back now from NY and his public school teaching gig in Brooklyn for three years. It looks like he might be here to stay. For now anyways.

These three artists are as different as their art is. But they share one thing in common, they all moved to Los Angeles for their art career. That might not sound so earth shattering, but it's noteworthy because that is happening quite a bit now, much more than ever. Gone are the

days when LA art pros told their students upon graduation, "Go to New York."

"LA's doable," Michael Dee says pragmatically. As a sound and installation artist, he said he "was attracted to certain artists like Paul McCarthy and Skip Arnold, and Martin Kersels, because they weren't limited, like even to one message, let alone to one certain medium." Dee was always LA-bound as far as which coast to go to. "New York's a grind," he says. Eventually he was forced out of his Bushwick, Brooklyn low rent studio because

of gentrification. "There was like dog shit everywhere, and drug dealers and prostitutes and homeless people and gangs. Why people involved in the corporate world feel this need to have warehouse spaces or have loft apartments, have this façade of like being rugged," said a baffled Dee. "For them it was cheap rent. For us, it wasn't."

After visiting with Dee, Samantha Fields is practically the Mary Tyler Moore of the art world. Her fresh-faced looks and perkiness made me feel like the crotchety Lou Grant with my tape recorder. Everything in her life seems to

effortlessly fit right into place. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio and a Cranbrook graduate, she just happened to win a fellowship that brought her to Los Angeles. "I did not plan to come to LA, I was going to New York." It would seem easy to hate her with all her good fortune, but Fields is a dedicated teacher, comes from a



Storm Anvil over the Great Plains (Nebraska), 2007
photo credit, Joshua White, courtesy Kim Light/LightBox

Samantha Fields:
Ready for another disaster
photo: Tyler Hubby

3

artists take different routes to LA



working class family, and paid for her own education. "I worked at Dairy Queen to put myself through school. I won a CAA professional development fellowship at Cranbrook. Joe Lewis, from Cal State Northridge Art Department was on the board. I was offered it right there on the spot. He asked me if I wanted to come to LA." She got a tenure track position within a couple of years, and the rest is history. "By then, I had fallen in love with LA, it took about a year and a half."

Kasper Kovitz falls somewhere in between Dee and Fields. Where Fields didn't really choose to come to the west coast, and Dee purposely made that decision, Kovitz applied for grants to get to the States to do his art. He ended up at the Mak Center as a visiting artist in 1996. At first he spent 6 months shuttling back and forth to Vienna, where he's from. He immediately liked Los Angeles. He would return several times with grants and invitations to other shows.

Oddly enough he ended up in New York with yet another grant. He was given a studio in Manhattan, but only a non-live-in space, so Kovitz had to get a job to afford a place to live, which meant he worked all day with little time left for making art. "Nowadays, it's a great address, but not very practical. I couldn't really use it as much as I would have loved to. They could have given us living space and a studio in Brooklyn and it probably would have helped me make more work than I did. It was a horrible situation."

All three artists are in their 30s with emerging art careers. They've made concrete choices that art is their way of life. Though all are at different levels in their calling: Fields is a tenured-track professor and is represented by Lightbox Gallery in Culver City; Kovitz just got back from showing in Vienna, and recently had a solo show with Another Year In LA gallery near downtown; Dee works from "project to project" and his art is being shown and sold by Gagosian gallery in Beverly Hills. Everybody's hard at work, that's for sure, with their full-time day jobs, making as much time as they can for their art, which is obviously their main devotion.



Kasper Kovitz: Jammin'

Valley Girls, 2006, jam & jelly & butter on canvas, courtesy of artist



Looking at these three diligent artists makes one realize they would be making art anywhere, a hovel in Timbuktu even. But moving to Los Angeles was a conscious decision to find the necessary atmosphere for producing vital and edgy art. Artists tend to thrive around other artists, and New York used to be the only place where that could happen in the States. Perhaps now Los Angeles can compete on that level as well.

But we should not dismiss these artists' roots. It's important to realize that LA art most likely takes on its oeuvre from its makers. And what these artists bring with them certainly contributes to the eclectic and fresh aesthetics being produced here. As a painter, Fields works with issues of environmental concerns. She grew up near Lake Erie, in a place where global warming was part of her formative years. "The lake doesn't freeze anymore, there's crocuses in January. It's just warmer." Before her landscapes she painted mutant animals, questioning genetic engineering and testing. She did her first "weather" painting of Mt. St. Helen's, while it was erupting two years ago, which developed into the "Storm" paintings. "When I did all the storm-chasing for my body of work at Kim Light, I was staying in Nebraska, amidst cornfields, where all the corn is GM Corn, unfit for human consumption. Here we are in the breadbasket and you can't even eat any of this stuff. They're making

genetically modified seed that can't propagate. Terminator seed. I mean, that's like the end of life. We're altering the environment in a fundamental way."

I asked Fields if she were living in New York, would she be doing these landscape paintings. "I don't think if I lived in New York, I would have the access to wilderness that I have here. Everything's so accessible here. If there's a fire in Simi [Valley], I'm gonna go drive up there and photograph it. The criticism about LA is (mocking an uppity voice) 'Oh you have to drive and there's smog.' But at the same time for me, that's how I'm

cont. on page 16



Mike Dee with his dog, Chui below: Star (Big Orange), 2006, collection of Homeira Goldstein, courtesy of the artist

able to make my work. (she hesitates ever so slightly), So, I don't think I'll leave LA, at all."

Kovitz grew up outside of Vienna and is a conceptual artist who has a particular talent to push his paintbrush around. He just happens these days to use jam — fruit preserves — for his medium. When asked why, and what about conservation, he just shrugs his shoulders and says, "It's not about the collectors, why I make work." But why jelly? And what about the ants? He shrugs his shoulders again and attempts to satisfy my burning question with a childhood story about when he once dropped his toast and remembers the texture the jam left on his clothes. But Kovitz wants to steer away from that; his main concerns in art are discovery and new ideas. He has a passion about creating the new. That was half the reason for coming to Los Angeles. "When I got to the U.S., for me, I started to use the national myth that moving west, The Manifest Destiny, as a metaphor for my own growing up, growing as an artist, as a way to have a concept I can use very loosely to describe myself. Moving west and becoming a capitalist. Coming west, to the western shore. The closing of the frontier, when you run out of states."

"Getting to the beach, the sunset. The conclusion, but at the same time, you're running out of space. That's what I like about it. I have a romantic view of L.A."

Dee's introduction to art is not as conventional as many artists. He was so disconnected to the art world that he wasn't even aware that Andy Warhol's nephew was his classmate. He laughs when he tells that story. His surroundings are a little on the scruffier side: he lives downtown in isolation with his devoted pit bull Chui. It would be a tossup who would be scarier to meet in a dark alley. Dee could be considered tall, fair and handsome, but he has a brooding demeanor. He was flying airplanes and interested in science as a teenager, and sees this as a natural stepping stone to art. "On an intellectual level, it's the same as making sculpture or video for me." His approach to art making is on a scientific level as well. His sculptures, made from sturdy clear plastic, look like bursting molecules, which he refers to as "stars," and his videos are more about sound mixing and sociology than a visual media.

Dee isn't centered on that one-man show in the sky (though he's had many). He's more worried about his art. What direction it's going, not where his career is going. This type of indifference about making it as an art star could be interpreted as unambitious, fear of failure syndrome, sort of anarchy art. It's practically Dadaist, and somewhat refreshing in comparison to the hungry art school graduates. Although he has made a decision to live and work in LA versus New York, he still is not sold on LA as The Place for art. "In New York, the slacker thing isn't as big. Like the unfinished paintings, the direct-from-the-tube paintings, the sculptures that look like they're falling apart. I call it 'schooled outsider art.'"

"A regional exclusivity" is what Dee came up with when trying to define LA art. "The exact same color palette, the exact same brush stroke, the exact same materials, the exact same editing programs, the exact same influences." But Dee would have to cop to some of this homogeneity too; for instance, his recent sculptures are made out of fused plastic cups — not exactly bronze sculpture.

At the same time, Dee has a high regard for LA art and admits that's why he's here. "I only interact with artists that are better than me. (huge pause with a sweeping gesture). Like, where are they? Are they avoiding me? (laughs all around). I mean, I wanna meet Sterling Ruby. I wanna pick his brain. I wanna hang out with him. And I like that guy a lot, Pentti [Monkkonen]. I wanna meet him. He shows at Black Dragon Society. He's awesome. I like Amy Sarkisian. She's one of my favorite artists too."

"Yeah, there are a lot of great artists out here, but it's like the radio. You gotta sift through some shit to find it." ■

Canvas

Eye on the Storm

While camping in the Mojave Desert, Samantha Fields looked up to see a tumultuous storm on the horizon. Rather than head for the tent, the artist grabbed her camera and started snapping. Back in her Los Angeles studio, she transformed the experience and her photographs into art. The mysterious paintings Fields made of that storm are part of a larger body of work reflecting her concern about global warming—and the extreme weather patterns that are appearing as a result. “I paint these scenes,” she says, “to raise awareness, to focus on our shared landscape, and to inspire awe in the face of planetary destruction.” Her latest series of paintings investigates wildfires in California. A longtime yoga practitioner, Fields says, “My work is fundamentally about trying to live with, and not in opposition to, nature.” —Annie Buckley



Samantha Fields, *Storm Anvil over the Great Plains (Nebraska)*, 2007. Acrylic on canvas.

Artillery Summer 2007

ECHOES
Orange County Center for
Contemporary Art

"ECHOES: Women Inspired by Nature" at OCCCA complements the national re-investigation of feminist art work spearheaded by the WACK! show at MOCA. Curated by Betty Ann Brown and Linda Vallejo, to focus on women who have been inspired by nature, "Echoes" brings together an eclectic group of nature-inspired work, ranging from celebrations of mother nature in her glory to apocalyptic notes on her decline. Call me a cynic, but I found the work the most interesting on this latter end of the spectrum. In fact, I would say that this sub-category work is not so much *inspired by nature* as it is inspired by the unnatural, particularly with respect to man's effect on the environment.

Take for instance Kim Abeles' "Presidential Commemorative Smog Plates." In the early '90s, at a time when global warming was commonly regarded as a kind of hoax orchestrated by left-wing

radicals, Kim Abeles was quietly creating art using LA city smog. Abeles placed stencil cut-outs of US presidents' faces on china plates, and left them on her rooftop, letting the smog do its work. Combined with piercing quotes from each president that reflect their administrations' impact on the environment, Abeles' work is even more trenchant and timely in 2007 than it was 14 years ago. A brilliant piece of political, environmental work, Abeles' work should be on permanent display in a major US venue.

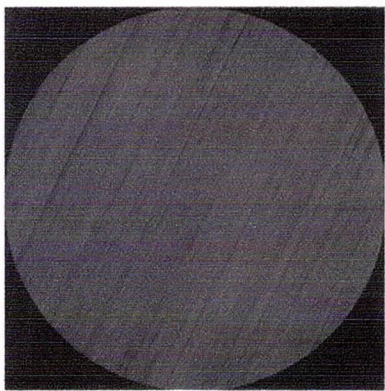
Another artist in the show whose work is inspired by the unnatural effect man has on nature is Yaya Chou. *Joy Coated* and *Chandelier* are both sculptures that go past the merely unnatural and into the synthetic. *Joy Coated* is more didactic, a child-size mannequin coated in Gummi Bears that melt at the child/doll's extremities, having/becoming the jouissance of childhood obsession: candy. The highly saturated, surreal colors of the Gummi Bears underscore this sense of humor and unease, evoking our nation of obese children, poisoned by toxic, synthetic food. *Chandelier*, also made from Gummi Bears, emits an eerie amber light with an attractive/repugnant smell of dusty, hot, gelatinous High Fructose corn syrup, akin more to the nauseating sweetness of bug spray than to the enticing aroma of butter cream frosting.

There are other notable examples of the unnatural in the show, including Linda Frost's creepy "The Tortured Souls" series, digitally manipulated photographs commenting on the use of animals in testing, and Pamela Grau Twena's *Protecting the Seeds*, a circle of bronze cast barbed apples that warn of the consequences of man messing with nature. Set in a circle protecting a few desiccated grapes, Twena's thorny apples evoke other fabled apples (Eve's, Helen's, Snow White's). Except in this case it is not just woman who is punished for her transgression, but rather all mankind if our machinations with bio-agriculture produce the kind of monstrous fruit that Twena imagines.

Samantha Fields' *In the Belly of the Beast* is the most apocalyptic of the group, and also the one that brings us from a meditation on man's unnatural effects on the environment to nature's enflamed responses. Depicting the hills of LA on fire, her somber acrylic painting is both a vision of hell and a warning. The LA area chapparal needs fire as part of its cycle

of growth, but sprawling over-development combined with global warming's drought and flood pattern redistribution make it so that fire is increasingly lethal. Fields' piece seems to say that nature will have the last word, even if it means the end of us.

—Carrie Yury



Channa Horwitz, *Pink to Burgundy Circle Variance no. 7, 2007*