

tema celeste

contemporaryart

113



valentin carron



Poste Italiane Spa - Spedizione in abbonamento Postale - D.L. 353/2003 (conv. In L. 27/02/2004 n. 46) art. 1, comma 1, DCB Milano
\$ 11,00 USA \$ 17,50 Canada £ 5,50 UK Sfr 12,50 Switzerland € 8,00 Austria € 8,00 Belgium € 8,00 France
€ 8,00 Germany € 8,00 Greece € 8,00 Italy € 8,00 Netherlands € 8,00 Portugal (Cont.) € 8,00 Spain

GABRIUS

made in los angeles

shana nys dambrot

In LA's current painting scene, Latin and Asian influences are combined with the identity-based political art of the 1980s, graffiti and post-digital flat graphics.



The truth is that it's no longer possible to give a simple answer to the question: What is Los Angeles painting? The scene's multi-generational, international scope lends it a strength and momentum that allows it to defy generalisation. And while among painters under the age of 45 there are undeniably vestiges of previous West Coast movements that still hold sway, these have evolved not into a singular identity but into an archipelago of related ideas. From the roots of the Light-and-Space Art of the late 1960s and '70s has grown an interest in brushless abstraction with an organic character. From the identity-based political art of the 1980s, a panoply of Latin and Asian influences have contributed to the visual lexicon. Rebellious young voices have embraced the recent love affair with graffiti and post-digital flat graphics, yet there is also a strongly academic, almost classical practice in evidence in both abstraction and figuration. And of course, some of the most interesting painting is being produced in the spaces in-between.

Andy Moses, for example, paints using controlled pours, and his line works at the mercy of gravity and motion. The dynamic fluidity of the swirls, eddies and receding horizons that emerge from this process is reminiscent of seascapes, but stops short of representation, retaining the ambiguity of action painting while courting the lyricism of colorist abstraction through radiant fuchsia, smoldering sapphire and pearlescent white. Jennifer Wolf, on the other hand, is the earth to Moses' ocean. She laboriously collects rocks and minerals and hand-grinds them into powdered pigments in a process replicating that used by old European masters. She too pours and pools her pigments, working in collaboration with gravity when it comes to compositions. And though her work is technically abstract, the topographical variegation of her surfaces is eerily reminiscent of the geological formations from which her work's components were excavated.



▲ **Jennifer Wolf** *Isolation#4*, 2005, mixed media / materiali vari, 107 x 107 cm. Courtesy William Turner Gallery, Santa Monica. Photo by / Foto di Gene Ogami.

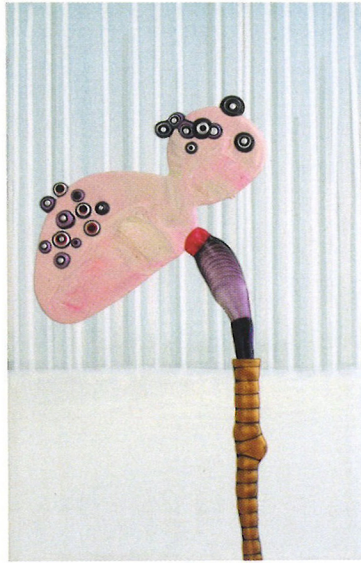
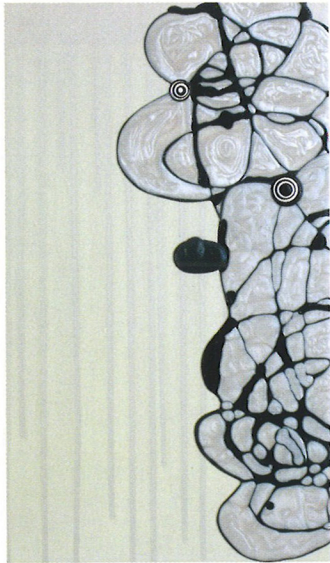
▲ **Fumiko Amano** *Pattern*, 2005, mixed media on wood / materiali vari su legno, 61 x 122 cm.

Sandeep Mukherjee is also a practitioner of the geologically evocative. He applies a variety of acrylic media to the non-absorptive plastic surfaces he works on, most often in a reserved, earthy palette and in variations on a layered spiral pattern. The labor-intensive, obsessive quality of his brushless mark-making resembles canyon striations; an effect heightened as large swaths of the spirals are erased and the extant white plastic is embossed into bas-relief, further highlighting its topographical features. The final images are redolent desert peaks and moss-carpeted valleys, but do not relinquish the physicality of closely engineered watery mosaics.

Marion Lane doesn't use a brush either, but her relationship to acrylic paint is quite different from her peers'. She is less enamored with chaos, although she remains interested in the operations of chance. She creates an endless array of individual biomorphic shapes of various sizes through a nearly agricultural process of constant pouring. Onto prepared wood

panels she applies color-field grounds, and arranges these shapes incrementally until an intuitively organic composition pops into focus. The resemblance to the flora, fauna and geography of this and other planets is quasi-accidental, forming a captivating counterpart to the futuristic opalescence of their glossy surfaces.

Tim Forcum and Fumiko Amano are both abstract painters in the European-style atelier tradition. Concerned with the mechanics of style, they share an academic purism when it comes to patterns, surfaces and planar spaces. Forcum's compositions are conglomerations of single-color shapes that snake and float and jostle each other against muscular color-fields. Lines result from scraping palette knives to remove wax-infused pigment in layers, revealing pockets of patinated detail and forming sinews between floating oblongs and ovals. His arrangement of color and shape creates optical movement that suggests a series of



▲ **Marion Lane** "Untitled" (BirdLand), 2005, acrylic on panel / acrilico su pannello, 25 x 43 cm each / ciascuno. Courtesy the artist / l'artista.

stacked planes, keeping the eye in motion. While Amano's form is not as crisply delineated as Forcum's, she shares his passion for exploration of technique and medium, viewing finished compositions not as ends in themselves, but as evidence of a problem-solving process. Her most densely detailed passages settle at the edges of her compositions, leaving her often powdery and delicate (though sometimes florid and sensual) color-fields empty at their centers. A suggestion of vines and hanging moss permeates the agitated brushwork, evoking blossoming branches that dissolve into pure paint at a distance of less than a foot.

Lucas Reiner is similarly more concerned with the properties of oil paint than the perfect representation of objects. His experimentation with the range of surfaces that can be culled from manipulating oil's dryness is paramount, but he is at heart a figurative painter. His newest pictures are of the moment after a firework has exploded and its flickering embers are nestled in clouds of white smoke that both highlight and diffuse them. As with Amano's work, the imagery evaporates with proximity, placing the burden on the paint to hold the viewer's attention. Rebecca Campbell's figuration is much more stridently realist than Reiner's, but her privileging of the personality of oil paint echoes his priorities. While executing some of the most flawless photorealist work in LA, Campbell still seems more interested in how it's done than in what it portrays.

Mark Licari's site-specific murals and haunting yet capricious watercolors are made fast but they don't miss a thing. His watery, expressive hand—which flouts perspective and dimensionality with a perverse visual wit—has a raw energy and unconventional style that is inclusive of the smallest detail even when executed on a grand scale. His recombinant depictions of creatures, foods and fluids explode with visceral, sophomoric joy, but are held together by a confident, mature use of medium. Thomas Eggerer's fanciful paintings arrange figures along transparent architectural grids in unlikely situations that both suggest and defy a narrative reading. His see-through layering and excruciatingly light touch nod to the dreamlike, artificial quality of both life and art in

a city so involved with the business of fantasy. Although Samantha Magowan also deals in dreams, hers are more unabashedly erotic. Her flirty, sophisticated compositions draw as much from a pattern-making vernacular and the graphic influences in fine art as from the rebellious guerrilla poster-art that peppers LA's car-culture cityscape.

Gaijin Fujita is also heavily influenced by the visual language of street art, and his unique method of incorporating it into his oeuvre combines the metal leafing and precise figuration of rarefied Japanese classicism with the sprayed tags of graffiti artists, both revering and transcending each element of his work and his identity. The poly-cultural influences on the work of Bari Kumar are also apparent, yet they get at their meaning through vastly different means. Kumar is a classical painter in style and temperament, whose symbolic figures boast sensual, baroque folds of flesh, and strike commanding spiritual poses. As with Fujita, he uses texts as elements of composition and conveyors of meaning, making use of hybrid characters and double entendre to express sociopolitical ideas. And as with Fujita, the success of this enterprise depends on its advanced technique.

Mark Dutcher is comfortable dealing in symbolism of both universal and personal content, executed in a smorgasbord of styles. His paintings often take the form of cabinets of curiosities—arrangements of painted shelves displaying mementos and icons, from flowers to jars of medicines, tea pots to ribbons, keys to dog collars, candles to chains. He achieves a balance between autobiography and conceptual academicism by embracing the possibilities of both; the narrative is elusive but immediate in its emotional impact, and upon closer inspection the image yields as many surface qualities as objects. From the flat and graphic to the expressive and tender, the realistic to the cartoonish, these paintings' real stories are hidden behind their pictures. And in a way, this is the one and only thing that can be said to be equally true of all the painting being done in Los Angeles now.

Shana Nys Dambrot is an independent art critic and curator. She lives and works in Los Angeles.