

Anno's abstractions, 'Marbles' at Noma

By **Kenneth Baker** Published 4:00 am, Saturday, September 26, 2009



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"Rose Snow" (2009) oil on aluminum by Kim Anno 49" x 37"

New abstract painting arrives today in an interpretive hall of mirrors where quotation, pastiche and the cannibalizing of motifs by designers can instantly embarrass any claim to originality.

In this situation, as the recent work of Bay Area painter **Kim Anno** at Sweetow demonstrates, only the integrity of studio practice itself - a self-defined internal logic of growth - can achieve the core strength that we hope to encounter in artworks.

For some years now, Anno has painted on sheets of aluminum, partly because of the inner light its finish produces, partly because its lack of absorbency leaves the fluid mechanics of her medium exposed.

She has developed a fluency unique to her methods and materials - a combination of pouring and elision - that issues in paintings such as "Rose Snow" (2009), an abstraction that, like nearly all her work here, will leave viewers thinking about global warming - or sensing their anxiety about it - without their being able to say quite why.

The elements of her installation resemble long fluorescent tubes, hanging vertical, each clad in a digitally doctored color photograph of an environment in jeopardy from global warming or other impacts of global mass society. She likens them to the core samples that geologists and paleontologists take to see a cross-section of the terrestrial past.

Sounds activated by motion sensors add a temporal dimension but little immediacy to these forms, and none of the urgency that Wight apparently feels about habitat destruction.

Wight's work will always be worth tracking because she seeks convergences and collisions between the sciences' and the arts' world pictures - an under-explored zone. The artistic failure of her show demonstrates the difficulty of what she has undertaken.

'Marbles' at Noma: Former Yerba Buena Center for the Arts exhibition curator **Betty Nguyen** has put together a small group show for the **Noma Gallery** that sets work by three Los Angeles artists into crackling permutations.

The show's name, "Play with Your Own Marbles," comes from a list of several dozen titles - some borrowed from books, some invented - by **Karl Haendel**. It contains alternatives such as "Strip and Knit," "Sunny Side of Bereavement," "Weeks in Wet Sheets" and "Happy though Married."

Haendel translated a computer printout of the list into two large scrolls on which he meticulously drew the print, vastly enlarged, and then scrawled his own afterthoughts in pencil alongside them. It makes entertaining reading.

Haendel has also contributed what he calls "Karl-o-grams," drawings in graphite of enlarged desktop objects such as paperclips and X-acto knife blades, that imitate the look of **Man Ray's** cameraless "Ray-o-grams."

Walead Beshty presents sculpture like that - if not the very ones - which caught my eye at the last Whitney Biennial in New York. Either title comes close to explaining what we see - here's one: "FedEx® Kraft Box ©2005 FEDEX 330504, Priority Overnight, Los Angeles-Miami trk#865344981325, October 29-30, 2008, Priority Overnight, Miami-Ann Arbor trk#861049125115, March 2-3, 2009, Standard Overnight, Ann Arbor-Los Angeles trk#868274625749, July 9-10, 2009."

The objects in question are cracked, scratched "shatterproof" glass cubes atop the tight-fitting Fed-Ex boxes in which they traveled the itineraries their titles outline. They recall the reflective glass boxes of Larry Bell, contrasting the precious treatment those works anticipate with a real world rough ride: a bizarre meeting of slapstick and poignancy.

A similar spirit informs **Patrick Hill's** "paintings" with cement, whose mimicry of brushstrokes mocks finesse while expressing a backhanded wish to enshrine the aesthetics of paint.

Kim Anno: Liquescent: paintings; **Gail Wight: Intertidal:** installation with sound and video. Through Oct. 17. Patricia Sweetow Gallery, 77 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 788-5126, www.patriciasweetowgallery.com.