

Studio Matters

notes & commentary

Three Approaches to Nature

Wendy Mark at Lori Bookstein Fine Art; The drawings of Rosemarie Beck and Paul Resika; Andrea Morganstern at Kimberly Venardos

by Maureen Mullarkey

WENDY MARK, AN ACCOMPLISHED PRINT MAKER, finesses several themes. But it is her near-miniature landscape variations, dominating this exhibition, that best fulfill her stated ambition to express a body of inherited forms in contemporary terms. With contemporaneity a swollen currency, Mark's conversation with past masters broadens her emotional range and achieves a certain eloquence.

Mark bypasses the disorder of nature to seek motifs in the formal vocabulary of the great names in landscape painting. With a cheerful kleptomaniac, she excerpts motifs from the history of landscape—a veil of atmosphere, the color and movement of clouds, the weight of skies or volume of a tree—making imaginative reconstructions from the models provided by the masters. She also nods to Wayne Thiebaud, who holds a patent on the candy-puff clouds that Mark adopts on occasion.

Out of Mark's paraphrases from tradition emerges a *beau idéal* of the natural world presented with a modern directness and simplicity. Self-conscious titles (e.g. *A Place to Take Off From, Where He Was in August*) signal that these are products of the studio, not natural vistas. In their seeming specificity, they achieve in litho ink what poet Marianne Moore sought with words: the creation of "imaginary gardens with real frogs in them."

Look carefully at *Halfway Over*, 2000. In a print under 6 inches square, Mark suggests a convincing bank of considerable expanse, all its varied vegetation and the sky above. An animated, improvised surface, stippled and wiped, yields an optical charm that is all the more appealing for its informality. Reminiscent of the textures and tonalities of Degas' late monoprints, this is Mark's technique at its loveliest. All else on view can be judged against this singular gem. And with one solitary exception, every thing succeeds in holding its own.

That exception is the display of 3 sets of cubes, similar to children's box puzzles. Each side is covered with an image clipped from discarded prints and set under Plexiglas. These are playful but slight, substituting

cuteness for pictorial interest. Mark serves herself best with work that makes no apology for a refined sensibility.

Lori Booskstein Fine Art, 37 West 57th Street, New York NY 10019. Tel. 212.750.0949



IN 1968, ROSEMARIE BECK AND PAUL RESIKA drew from the figure together, sharing models in a Washington Square studio. Thirty five years later, the result of those sessions is on the wall in an instructive pairing.

In Resika we see an ebullient, sensuous colorist contending with the austerities of line and the discipline of anatomy. His sketches leave an impression of things glimpsed over the artist's shoulder, rehearsals that at the time of their making were not intended for an audience.



Rosemarie Beck

Beck's drawings, the anchor of this ensemble, are beautiful. Bearing the stamp of Cezanne in their hatchings and broken contours, their communicative value is wholly personal. They convey the volumes and expressive rhythm of the human body with distinctive grace and tenderness.

Beck was a deft draughtsman, unintimidated by the heightened challenge of figures in pairs. She made effective use of shadows to unify separate masses and create spatial veracity. With a gift for abstracting from bodily facts, she handled the demands of male musculature with the same transforming ease she brought to the arabesques of the female body. In an era of dreary eroticism, her drawings make creditable John Donne's sweet cry: "Full nakedness! All joyes are due to thee."

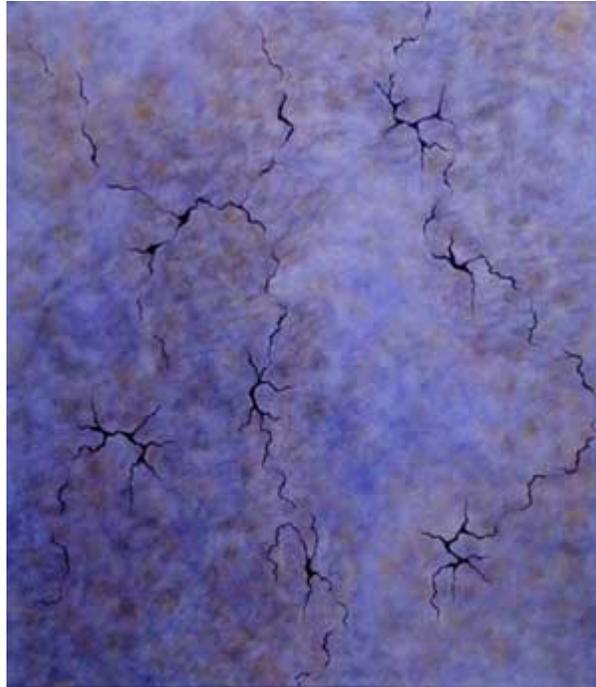
Lori Bookstein Fine Art, 37 West 57th Street, New York NY 10019. Tel. 212.750.0949



ANDREA MORGANSTERN IS A PAINTER IN SEARCH of a subject. She creates delicate surfaces that appear to exist for their own sake regardless of the motif. Love of surface drives the picture, instead of the other way around. Her images are distilled from nature—bamboo shoots, birds or,

most recently, a tracery of jagged, lightening-like forms—but with little of the natural left in them.

Tender oil glazes, applied one over the other, appear to have been breathed onto the canvas. The mark of a brush is barely visible. *Desert Pulse*, 2003, is indicative of her approach. Here, an undulating rhythm of pale cadmium and yellow ochres combine to suggest the heat and movement of sand on a desert floor. It is evocative, not realistic. Any illusion of reality is shattered by the web of pale viridian cracklings that migrate across the picture plane unlike anything in nature. These are patterns decorating a surface still waiting for a purpose to support.



Arctic Cascade

Arctic Cascade, 2003, is the most successful of the series. Red-black veining is perfectly pitched in width, extra-fine so that the drawing of it does not call attention to itself as something applied on top. It appears, instead, as if the dappled canvas had been splintered by some inner force. The illusion of fissure lends needed strength to the gentle play of blues and violets of the ground.

Morganstern possesses a sensibility more at home in a monastic scriptorium than on the modernist battlefield. Like several artists in Kimberly Vernardos' stable, she seems a manuscript illuminator deprived of a text. Artists with a sense of humor can turn that deprivation on its head and pull whimsy from it. But Morganstern turns inward to make a sacred text out of some vague spirituality culled from Eastern philosophy.

Less concentration on Vedantic practices and a deeper love for the visual world—and its great interpreters—would give this artist the focus on which all possibility of emotional depth depends.

Kimberly Vernardos, 1014 Madison Avenue, at 78th Street, New York 10021. Tel. 212.879.5858

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