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VIRGINIA KATZ



Virginia Katz, "Formation – White Melt White Freeze"

June 11 – July 16, 2011 at Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica
By Shirle Gottlieb

After wandering through galleries that feature cutting-edge trends in 21st-Century art (digital wizardry, in-your-face graffiti, electronic constructions, ocean debris sculpture, Photoshop enhancement, sustainable art, etc.), what a treat it is to see paint! Thick, traditional, tried-and-true, oozing oil pigment. That's the medium Virginia Katz has chosen for half of her new exhibit, "Charted Territories." And she has the technical skill to use it.



Virginia Katz, "Formation – White Melt White Freeze," 2010, mixed media, mixed process, gouache and silver leaf on paper on panel, 36" x 52".

By slathering vibrant, earth-colored pigment on panels of wood with bold brush strokes and her palette knife, Katz creates three-dimensional paintings that capture the textures, patterns, and raw surfaces of the earth. Swirling rivers and mounds of paint evoke bas relief sculpture and abstract expressionistic imagery simultaneously. Each work bears a simple title that describes some natural element such as "Mud" (overlapping layers of ochre pigment), "Slush" (irregular black and white cubes that suggest melting ice), and "Rio" (a coastline of gorgeous color that is a guaranteed show-stopper).

In the past Katz has captured the rhythm of waves, the patterns of light, and the motion of wind. Knowing her long fascination with nature, it comes as no surprise that her latest inspiration would be space - spurred on by recent satellite photographs. Just so, the second half of this exhibit is based on aerial views of the cosmos. Called "Formations" and "Path," each series consists of mixed-media, multi-layered works on paper - plus leaves, vines, bark and soil which Katz has added to her process of painting, printing, drawing, and collage. With names such as "Red and Gray Dust Cloud," "Scape Cloud," "Night Smoke," and "Evening," these poetic, equivocal skylscapes can play mind-tricks with each person's perception and creative imagination.



AUG. 13, 15th & AUG. 19, 21st

Some viewers may interpret Katz's images as looking up from the earth into space (through climate, mist, and clouds). Conversely, others may see them as looking down from a satellite towards the earth (through time, space, and evolution). Then again, when we recall the vast role that both gradual and catastrophic processes of natural history have played in the formation of the universe over eons of time, some of the 'territories' Katz has 'charted' could be either or both of them. For example, if, as scientists believe, there was water on Mars millennia ago, its current landscape would certainly resemble Katz's captivating "Arid Ocean." And if, as we've been told, the climate of the North Pole was hot during its formation, "Arctic Red" would resemble a desert remnant of our pre-historic past.

Katz created "Dissections," "Mixed Terrain," and "Path-Swell" after observing that natural patterns are similar wherever you look. Whether in vast, large-scale territories or in small-scale mundane areas, physical topography (creases, crags, cracks, fissures, fumes, swells, mist) is indistinguishable. Emblematic patterns exist across the earth in monumental mountains and alluvial plains, as well as in mundane places as miniscule as drains and street gutters.

Katz's keen observations of the natural world, coupled with her inimitable expression of it through her art, give viewers a lot to think about. Indeed, each work in "Chartered Territories" provides a provocative view of the mysteries of Mother Nature.



Virginia Katz, "Formations – Red and Grey Dust Cloud," mixed media, mixed process on paper on panel, 66" x 36".

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