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Reviews

SAN DIEGO

“Atmospheric Abstraction” QUINT GALLERY

The title of this group show, “Atmospheric Abstraction,” neatly suggested the historical lineage of a collection of contemporary nonfigurative work by Los Angeles-based artists heavily indebted to their Southern California Light and Space predecessors.

Anchored by recent kinetic three-dimensional works by the Light and Space sculptor Larry

Bell, paintings and sculptures by younger practitioners Gisela Colón, Mara De Luca, and Heather Gwen Martin demonstrated a willful extension of the movement’s phenomenological imperatives. Colón’s “Glo-Pods,” 2013–, irregularly shaped wall-mounted acrylic orbs, recall the languid organicism of Craig Kauffman’s candy-colored bubbles; their intimation of light emanating from within the impossibly smooth contours additionally channels Helen Pashgian’s illuminated monoliths. Unlike Pashgian’s plinths, or Doug Wheeler’s neon-backlit canvases, Colón’s scarab-like objects achieve their iridescence via the play of natural light, yet the sculptures appear to change color as one moves around them, as if lit by multihued bulbs. Perhaps more to the broader point, Colón’s labors are very much of her own; in fact, her multi-step process of blow-molding, laminating, and layering of contemporary industrial plastics is commonly referenced in the press as involving an unspecified “proprietary” process, with the studio positioned as a site of industrial fabrication. Her employ of industrial materials and techniques thus structurally redoubles an earlier industry-driven technophilia, even as she eschews her predecessor’s penchant for outsourcing production.

De Luca and Martin, by contrast, appropriate California Minimalism less explicitly; however, they too seem particularly attuned to the optical properties of color as atmosphere. For Martin, this translates into abstract paintings featuring potent combinations (e.g., a gray that reads as lilac against a lime ground or a cobalt that cools a sunny tangerine expanse) in slick, saturated monochromes crossed by thin, often nervy lines and punctuated with surreal cartoony geometries. Martin’s evocatively titled works (*Cave Song*, *Ice Blanket*, and *Warm Back*, all 2015) recall Sue Williams copes drained of their suggestive figuration. For De Luca, color (and especially colored light) evokes place, specifically Los Angeles. Her paintings often bring to mind dusk, their palettes keyed to such familiar referents as gathering clouds and incandescent sunsets. Planetary orbs recur within the image fields, and brass, nickel, and copper frames appended to border sections of the panels likewise appear throughout, serving as compositional elements that reflect ambient light onto geometric representational forms where they meet the painted gradients.

For his part, Bell’s new sculptures feature flexible polyester sheets, vacuum-coated with aluminum and silicon-monoxide films, which fold in on themselves, hanging from thin metal wires within his signature translucent, reflective cubes. These further complicate the viewer’s registration of the planes and multiply the possibilities of the warped prismatic forms, which also reflect and distort their surroundings. In the wake of “Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980” and other shows reviving the Los Angeles ’60s sublime, it was gratifying to see Bell’s most recent work, which highlighted a logical throughline within a consistent language. Here though, in the company of successors rather than that of peers, Bell’s work additionally provided a pedigree and justification for the present grouping, as well as the key to a reading of that prior moment that has gone underacknowledged. For what this show proposed—in bringing together three women artists as legatees—is that the world caught on the glossy, antiseptic surfaces was far from empty. It perhaps should go without saying that it was populated by subjects, and that a hermetic, autonomous form with an apotropaic veneer does not change this. Pure perception is—and was—a fiction that necessarily cedes to embodiment, affect, and difference.

-Suzanne Hudson



View of “Atmospheric Abstraction,” 2015-16. From left: Mara De Luca, *RAMONA 1 (SV)*, 2015; Heather Gwen Martin, *Cave Song*, 2015; Larry Bell, *3D VD 1.30.15D*, 2015; Gisela Colón, *Mega Rectangloipoid Glo-Pod (Iridescent Red)*, 2014. Photo: Philipp Scholz Rittermann.