

# PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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## art ltd.

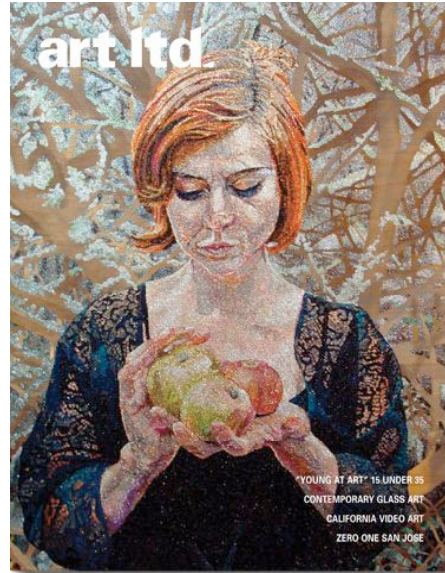
WEST COAST ART + DESIGN

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### young at art: 15 artists under 35

#### Jamie Vasta, San Francisco

by Laura Richard Janku



All that glitters may no be gold, but Jamie Vasta has a definite Midas touch with a certain crafty material. With a brush of her fingertips, glitter is alchemized from carnivalesque into uncanny and classic figurative paintings. Vasta's most recent works continue to upend Disney's sanitized versions of myth and fairytale. With glitter as a powdery shorthand for the magic that cuts both ways, she reinstates the original, darker fables where human nature is darker and messier and endings are usually not happy. In her current *Witches* series, Vasta has sharpened her focus from slightly macabre staged narrative scenes to renaissance-like portraits of powerful women. Timeless and beguiling, Vasta's subjects radically revise the cartoons of haggard crones and evil sorceresses into archetypes of strength, whose nimbleness, beauty and enchantment are embodied by their glinting and mercurial materiality.

Inspired by Buddhist sand mandalas and sequined voodoo flags. Vasta realized that glitter's physical response to light achieved effects that even haloed oil paint could not. As an undergrad at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, many professors sniffed at her use of a "low" material. Like the strong women she portrays, Vasta persisted. "I like having to create my own rules...working with a material that doesn't have centuries of history to answer to. Glitter is wide open." Fortunately, the MFA program at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco (she graduated in 2006), afforded her the space and support to delve into its full potential. Exhaustive experimentation and a shift in subject matter resulted in her breakthrough *Ecstatic Landscapes* (2005) which echo the transcendence of nineteenth century Romantic painting. *Un/Natural Disasters* (2006) complicated pure landscape with death and destruction—fire and storms lend themselves particularly well to glitter, as do the glowing parking lot lights in the *Suburban Sublime* works from 2006. With each new series humans have stepped closer to the fore and Vasta has delved deeper into their psyche. In *Arcadia* (2006) people by virtue of their

small scale and casual activities-were visitors in the natural environment; in *Mustn't* (2007) they occupied center stage, engaged in slightly sinister rituals.



As *White as Snow*, **Jamie Vasta**. Glitter, stain on wood. 2007. 36 x 48 inches

Vasta's process has also shifted to the more deterministic. Where she used to use found images as her sources, she now carefully choreographs and photographs performances for her paintings. She hires models and scouts secluded sites. On location, she dresses and directs the subjects into open-ended scenes that speak of archetypal characters and situation, and human nature. Back in the studio, Vasta edits, selects and crops the images that imagine a particular moment across myth and time. While the new Witches are less macabre than the earlier violent narrative threads she pulled from legend, the Bible, the Iliad, and Angela Carter's feminist fairy tales, they are no less disarming and ambiguous. Framed by Vasta's signature tangle of bare stained branches, the witches' formal poses and regal bearing establish that they are in control. The paintings' shimmer of variegated color confirm that there is no black-and white in this world, and the glitter in the witches' eyes-along with ongoing art-world accolades-suggest that Vasta has indeed cast her spell.