

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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'Peripheries of Narrative' at Patricia Sweetow Gallery

By Amber Whiteside



Weston Teruya, *It Hardened Her Resolve When They Told Her She'd Be Back Soon*, 2006, spraypaint, gouache, collage, ink, color pencil on paper, 71" x 90"



Michele Carlson, *It Was Too Bright to be Dark... to be flying. But they were determined to see space*, 2006, ink, collage on paper, 41" x 86"

Guest curated by artist and California College of the Arts associate professor Kim Anno, *Peripheries of Narrative* assembles the work of five CCA 2006 MFA graduates - Michele Carlson, **Weston Teruya**, Susan Chen, Katie Lewis and Jamie Vasta - each of whom engages "craft" or "low-art" materials and techniques to articulate their own respective narrative within a shared contemporary moment.

Carlson takes as her subject a troop of hip-hop heroines who always seem to be in transit, deployed via sailing vessels, airplanes and futuristic crate mechanisms for some important cause. Crisply rendered in black ink on large expanses of white paper, the work is lent texture and dimension through ornate patterning in the fabric of the vessels' sails, the planes' banners and the women's flowing frocks. Often dwarfed by or hidden amid the modes of transport, the women are difficult to locate in the compositions, and their purpose difficult to infer. But because Carlson identifies the subjects as "hip-hop" women, who operate en masse in works with serious titles like *After all their days. They didn't need anyone to tell them where to go. Where? That was for another day*, we know these women to be agents of resistance. Stowed away in ships and planes, their short-term tactic seems to be thwarting the missions of oppressors and evildoers with endless rolls of fabric - striped, checked, polka-dotted and paisley textiles that wrinkle, wrap and parachute across the landscape. No doubt there's more up these women's billowing sleeves.

Teruya worked as a counselor at a juvenile hall in Los Angeles that was situated on a country club golf course, and takes this provocative pairing of social institutions as the jumping off point for his most recent series of work. Like Carlson, Teruya's very tight drawings (in ink, collage, spraypaint, gouache and color pencil) pop against large expanses of white paper. Co-mingling symbols and ephemera from the juvenile hall and golf course, Teruya creates an unrecognizable, nonfunctional hybrid space. Trees are wrapped up in chain-link fence and grafted with fragmented stone gargoyle heads. A white raft defects from the country club carrying limp flag markers, squares of sod, and more chain link fencing. Not a single human being appears here, but the contested space continues wrestling with its own identity, and has yet to yield a winner.

Space wrestles with itself again in Chen's work, but in this case it's outer space. Chen re-visions the evolutionary history of the world in her video piece *Arctic Eden*. Crafting sets from hobby store objects, Chen films in low resolution (using a low-end ballpoint pen spy camera) to create a color-saturated, blurry montage; a sort of kaleidoscopic unfolding of unintelligible but plenty dramatic - even apocalyptic - happenings. In the sequence, moss-covered rocks with palm trees break apart and tumble against a fiery pink sky. All of existence spins and dissolves, only to reappear with new shapes and colors as Chen guides us across millions of years, a never-ending cycle of creation and destruction, of which - we can't help but be reminded - we are only a blip on the low resolution screen.

Lewis records her own unique corporeal sensations through exactly executed pin and string installations. Standing back from the pieces, they exude a sort of frenetic electricity, bounding around like static on a television set, playing tricks on viewers' eyes. The pins are inserted into the wall at varying lengths, and the strings at varying distances - all carefully calculated to correspond to sensations in Lewis's body; sensations our bodies can relate to. Crimson colored, taut like sinews or the strings of an instrument, the wall sculptures swell and contract, relax and strain, tingle and fall still.

Vasta is unabashed in her search for beauty, open to locating it in banal suburban scapes and - always - embellishing it with glitter. Glitter is Vasta's primary medium and she wields it expertly on wood panel; she employs graphite and charcoal conservatively by comparison. Rendered entirely in glitter, *Lights* captures a quiet suburban park at night. Lit up artificially, by lampposts, with flat, wide, over-groomed walking paths and barely a bush, tree, flower, or leaf to be seen, it could just as easily be an empty convenience store parking lot, but why should that make it any less beautiful? And just because the brilliant luster is generated from glitter and not oil paint or precious stones, should we be any less impressed? Interestingly, the people who are missing from the suburban park clutter the more naturally occurring, idyllic beauty captured in *Arcadia: The Waterfall* and *Arcadia: The Swimming Hole*, and Vasta lavishes these compositions with less of her glitter wand. It seems she reserves her glitter for those spaces whose beauty isn't as readily gleaned.

In an effort to make meaning of their place on this earth at this time, and envision a future worth striving toward, each of these artists has set about to first deconstruct the master narrative and re-imagine a collective past. Whether measuring their own experiences and sensations, or crafting characters and events out of glitter and low-end spy cameras, Carlson, Teruya, Chen, Lewis and Vasta insert their own homespun discoveries into authoritative truths about evolutionary science, political history, human biology, beauty, and of course, art itself.