

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Gale Antokal: No Vanishing Point

By TIMOTHY BUCKWALTER

On the occasion of Gale Antokal's fourth solo exhibition at Patricia Sweetow Gallery, Timothy Buckwalter asked the artist a few questions on how viewers should look at her current work.

Timothy Buckwalter: In the last decade your drawings have changed -- the orbs, spheres and glassware you were drawing the '90s were very precise, the images very specific. Not that you're a photorealist, but your intention seemed to be a kind of elegant appraisal of certain objects.

More recently your drawings (pastel on paper) have become hazier and more ambiguous... and you seem to be using photos as a source now, instead of the actual object.

Gale Antokal: Actually, the objects from the '90s were all photo based. I took hundreds of photos in different light sources, and in those days, pre-Photoshop, I would have the 35mm rolls developed, and each time, alter the color temperature and contrast. I needed the photography to give the drawing a foundation on which to reestablish an elusive power -- an intensified subject matter in the foreground, a heightened realism, yet there was actually a subtle, complex layer of secrets in the relationships and qualities of the forms being described in pastel.

The photos I use are now considered for their degradation and inability to be read. I enhance them making the image even more low contrast. There is a vagueness of vision and clarity. It describes a "failure of sight" on many levels. It also speaks of how the past is obscured.

TB: Well, certainly by removing the figure the audience must form a new relationship with your drawings, since figures are generally the keys that people use to open the door of a painting or drawing (your new pieces feature only clouds or trees).

But I wonder after so many years of creating figurative work are your new pieces the beginning of a journey into the abstract?

GA: Yes.

As it began, objects started to translate into thoughts and depictions of lost, or abandoned or unclaimed possessions. Then, I looked at the nature of weight and gravity. I started thinking about what we leave behind to prove we have existed at all.

The carvings left by ice skates or sleds, or footprints in the snow.

I am thinking more about what is left when everything is taken away. These places have a primordial quality, even though the photo sources are very mundane and the locations are very personal. There is more absence of life (whether it is birds (the flying ash), or figures (the walking dust).

I also like thinking about the fact that usually a sense of "place" is perceived when there are two descriptors. An "above" and a "below" and the relation between the two. Usually the consequent edge is a horizon.

TB: Clouds and trees, at this point in our history, are pretty clichéd. How is the viewer going to separate your chalk drawings from say a nature calendar (which features nature sans traces of man) or drawings on the sidewalk of Venice beach (which are about the beauty of the material)? Is there some clue that you provide to help your audience enter a different emotional viewing platform? Or are they to take it at face value, and the informed can place your work outside of those parameters by simply knowing the history of your intentions?

GA: In the larger sky and forest drawing, the colors are not the accessible or predictable colors of the venues you describe. I'd say the dark indigo and purple colors look more like bruises. The one forest that is pale gray and white, to me, "sounds" like the moment a shot is being fired.

Have you ever been close to shelling? I have. There is an instant, when you go white-blind before the sound hits.

The small treetop pieces (not displayed in the gallery show, but on my site) I might read as black smoke.

The photo sources for the large purple cloud were shot while I was driving, precariously, with my camera in one hand through a windshield, and my other hand on the steering wheel. You can therefore understand why I had no idea what was above or below at the time. I was totally disoriented.

Gale Antokal's No Vanishing Point is on view at Patricia Sweetow Gallery through June 14, 2008.