

# PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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*Belly Button Window*, 2006, mixed media on canvas, 72 x 60 inches

## "Pyramid Dreams"

*Ziggurats of basketballs and Asiatic Traumanauts*

By Stacy Martin

At first glance, the latest body of work by Bay Area artist David Huffman comes off as a display of traditional Chinese landscapes. But instead of depicting mountains appearing through mist and looming over villages, Huffman's paintings give us murky, swirling atmospheres that become muddy rivers and outer-space ranges, then fold around rocky hills or barren plains punctuated with dead trees. African American men garbed in astronaut suits soldier through a variety of activities (Huffman calls them Traumanauts). The Asian landscape compositions function as a kind of game of Candy Land, a map for Huffman's epic, sad, and dreamy dramas. Time travel is implied with juxtaposed layers of history and science fiction. Each fantastic stew of floating images is culled from folkloric symbols, icons of horrors from America's racist history - and present-day urban culture.

One key image is a pyramid of basketballs - an homage to ancient Egypt but also evocative of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The Traumanauts mound the balls or use them in cosmic basketball games. The balls are offerings in the hope of finding a way back to the home planet, signifying the promise of a lucrative sports contract that will airlift the residents out of their desolation. In *Earth Blues*, groups of Traumanauts hang lynched from leafless trees. The three-paneled folding-screen painting *Katrina, Katrina, Girl You've Been on My Mind* has the Traumanauts wading through the muck of last year's toxic flood, waving from the tops of buildings, slogging through guck - and floating facedown. In the more spacey, psychedelic images, they march toward exploding, chrysanthemumlike stars.

Although these black men swirl around mystically in time and space, they can't escape - this astral location, which wormholes from era to era, does not permit a way out. Huffman, however, has also incorporated smears of glitter, reminiscent of stars in space or magic pixie dust. Maybe they signal some small hope that these scenes could eventually disappear like a dream after waking.

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