

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Kim Anno's liberal media

Artist tackles abstraction with gusto for the painted surface

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by Deanna Sirlin



In a small but powerful solo show of paintings, photographs, and video at Marcia Wood Gallery, San Francisco Bay Area artist Kim Anno tackles abstraction with gusto for the painted surface. Uncompromisingly committed to non-representational painting, Anno says in her artist statement, "I want to make the last abstract painting I can before it becomes narrative."

Anno's work reflects the assurance of one who knows her medium — specifically, how to achieve luminosity with paint. She's executed her midsize paintings on wood or aluminum rather than stretched canvas. The paint-tinted aluminum panels have a distinct shimmer. To create the shapes their surfaces, Anno poured paints of different densities and then manipulated the images by tilting or wiping them. The work looks improvised, as if the artist allowed her compositions to reveal themselves rather than predetermining them.

The elegant horizontal work "Sheer" fits a large swath of opaque white with a deep alizarin crimson so transparent it reveals the shiny aluminum underneath. A thin passage of burnt orange at the work's top melts into the white. Peacock blue stretches down the painting's right side and settles into a cartoony brushstroke that separates into three different colors. Periwinkle thrusts upward into the white and dissolves there. A tiny string of red drips down the left above a soupçon of verdant green along the bottom.

There's no narrative here, but no need for one either. Instead, there is the sublimity that

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occurs when an artist gets it just right; when all the pieces of an abstract composition fall into place, all the tones work together, and the linear elements direct the eye around the painting in a meaningful trajectory.

Anno's work in media other than painting does contain distinct narratives. She's a committed environmentalist; her exquisite videos, which juxtapose representations of nature with real natural elements and refer to human intervention in the natural environment, are the first things you see upon entering the gallery. Anno suspends landscape photos culled from *National Geographic* and other sources in an aquarium full of water, then pours ink into the water and drops in objects. The ink drifts through the water, creating an effect similar to John Cage's smoke drawings. Like Cage, the artist relinquishes full control of the works by allowing the ink to create its own paths and the objects to float or sink according to the laws of gravity.

One video, "In the West," shares its title with a book on Nebraska history from which the artist whispers select passages. The video is manipulated so that we see both the book and its mirror image, like a Rorschach blot resembling a butterfly. Watching white ink spill and swirl as it irradiates the image in "Yosemite," it's difficult not to think about the current ecological catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico. Areas of color that bleed into and rub up against one another appear in all of Anno's work. While her painting remains abstract, her work in video and photography use similar means to articulate a passionate commentary on our treatment of nature.