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GALLERIES

The Boston Globe

Paintings with a silvery mood; a motel suffers sands of time



Jacqueline Humphries uses glitter -- and her own silver paint -- to add dimension to her untitled paintings at the Albert Merola Gallery.

By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent | August 23, 2007

PROVINCETOWN -- Glitter is kitschy, glitter is glam; glitter is saccharine and pretty. The painter Jacqueline Humphries throws all that to the wind, deploying glitter with nuance and care in some of the wonderful abstract paintings she has up at Albert Merola Gallery. Her sparkle doesn't denote sentimentality, nor does it push her paintings over the top. Instead, it adds another tone to her complex harmonies of light and reflectivity.

Humphries mixes her own silver paint -- delicious, shimmery stuff that changes its mood if a cloud passes over the sun

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Amy Arbus, Marty Davis, Paul Stopforth, Vicky Tomayko

outside. She applies it, and other colors, to canvases with improvisational bravado, a strategy that recalls de Kooning and Pollock. Here and there, she uses tape to interrupt her torrent with quiet geometry.

Reflectivity is her current passion. One red-on-silver piece (all are untitled) features fire-engine-red oil paint butting heads with a phosphorescent red that looks as if it would glow in the dark. The two bat each other around in tangling strokes, then leap like flames to the upper right, where they almost appear to recede against the bright silver background.

Glitter shows up amid broad strokes of silver on one audacious canvas, punching the gleam up a notch. And in another, a black, spangled column drops down the silver canvas; Humphries echoes it with more ethereal verticals, also bright with glitter, evoking shadows that miraculously shine.

House of sand

This past year, the Pilgrim Spring Motel along Route 6 in North Truro closed its doors after more than 50 years to make way for an office park and artists' studios. The rooms have been demolished, and the first undistinguished offices have been erected, but the hotel's office is still up, and artist and prankster Jay Critchley has got his hands on it.

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It is an eye-catching A-frame with wings, and he has painted it beige and encrusted it with sand. In 2002, physicists at Johns Hopkins University declared that the color of the universe is beige. It's Critchley's base color; at night, he lights the building with red, amber, or green. What was evidence of a 1950s-era driving culture and an eye-catching if cheesy architectural style is now another kind of roadside attraction, an audacious monochrome against the night sky, looking like a spaceship alighting at the side of the parking lot.

"Beige Motel," which is open on Fridays and Saturdays from noon to 2 p.m., is ambitious, bittersweet, and comic. It also feels unfinished. Critchley has invited several artists to set up installations inside. One outer wall is half demolished, and the place is musty and littered with refuse. On a tour, Critchley suggested that certain inadvertent qualities -- like holes in the wall -- were spontaneous installation art. No dice: Installations take intention and work.

Some of the installations inside fit the bill. Frank Vasello's "Shrine," made from rose petals and eggshells, is fragrant and delicate, a haven of beauty amid the dust and junk. Jim Peters and Vicky Tomayko teamed up for the lurid and funny "eye dolatry," a room full of bobbing, leering, clustering painted eyeballs.

On the outside, "Beige Motel" is a success. On the inside, it needs more work -- artwork, that is.

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At: The Schoolhouse Gallery, 494 Commercial St., Provincetown, through Sept. 5. 508-487-4800, schoolhouseprovincetown.com

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Other worlds

Tomayko, a printmaker, has monotypes up in a group show at the Schoolhouse Gallery. She offers up pictures of lost and forlorn otherworldly creatures. There's humor and edge to her scenes, and she excels with color. Her subtle, punchy tones capture the spooky, lost mood in her narratives.

Also in the show, virtuoso painter Paul Stopforth, who had been painting Robben Island for years, leaves that prison scene behind for more anonymous subjects. He uses gouache to streak and layer colors in the background of his works with a lush style reminiscent of Gerhard Richter. Then he paints his landscapes or still lifes over that ground. In each, the interaction between figure and ground plays out differently, but all suggest that the flowing background is like time, which will eventually erode the present moment of the foreground. In "Another Country," we see on the right a concrete pier, and the silhouette of a wall and a tower at the end of it. On the left, Stopforth paints the reflection of that scene in a rear-view mirror. It's here, in shadows and light, and then a reflection. And then, one supposes, gone.

Also on view at the Schoolhouse Gallery, Marty Davis's extraordinarily subtle monotypes and aquatints revel in gradations of tone and texture; viewing them is like looking through layers of a shifting fog, with occasional bolts of light swinging through in broad strokes and spiny crackles. Amy Arbus's black-and-white photos hang appropriately nearby. Like Davis, Arbus is a connoisseur of grays. These photos date back to the 1980s, when she had a regular gig shooting style on the street for the Village Voice. Madonna is here, and the Clash, but the more anonymous people are more interesting, showy in their clothes but often shy before the camera.

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