

A Lot of Local Abstraction



Written by Peter Frank

Mucho buzz about abstract painting in California; here are three shows that generate their share of the excitement. Carlos Villa and the late Leo Valledor, both Filipino–Bay Areaans — cousins, in fact, born the same year (1936) but with very different artistic temperaments — show together to great advantage. Villa’s the more reticent, conceptual one, exploring gray nuances and constructed painting-objects. Valledor did big, bold, geometric forms, the colors brilliant. Valledor’s is a ’60s mentality, cultivated in New York before he returned West; Villa’s cool, misty, contemplative spirit is total San Fran Zen.

Nothing shy about the forms and objects, organic and geometric, rainbow-hued or black as pitch, shown by the 10 artists of “Immodesty.” Check out the dense, intricate paintings of Jerrin Wagstaff and Steve Roden, the enigmatic sculptures of Nancy Evans and Cathy Stone, the nonobjective Japanese scrolls of Tom Krumpak, the vigorous organicism of the late Irene Pijoan, and the literally ballsy wall work of the too-rarely-seen Robin Mitchell.

Most righteous show of all is “A Little So Cal Abstraction,” bringing together veterans and newcomers of the nonobjective-painting scene in these parts, from Karl Benjamin and Richard Allen Morris to Michael Reafsnyder and Daniel Mendel-Black. One-color paintings by the likes of Marcia Hafif, Scot Heywood, Olivia Booth and Carolee Toon rock (no surprise, as surface-whipping monochromist James Hayward put the show together), but so do the eye-zappers, stark (John M. Miller’s black-and-white patterns popping in the cornea) or exquisite (Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe’s gently gradated play of drawn geometries and painted fields) — and the everything-in-it black-and-white canvas of Ed Moses. All paintings are easel size, but their windows open onto universes. *Valledor and Villa at Mendenhall Sobieski Gallery, 40 Mills Pl., Pasadena; Tues.-Fri., 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Sat.-Sun., noon-5 p.m.; thru Oct. 3. (626) 535-9757. “Immodesty” at Another Year in L.A., 2121 N. San Fernando Road; Mon.-Wed., noon-5 p.m., Sun., 1-4 p.m.; thru Oct. 6. (323) 223-4000. “A Little So Cal Abstraction” at Mandarin, 970 N. Hill St., Chinatown; Wed.-Sat., 1-6 p.m.; thru Oct. 15. (213) 687-4107.*

