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Reindorf at Galatea

Man Vs. Nature

by Joshua Ascherman

Lisa Reindorf is no stranger to political art; she's received acclaim for a series of gesturally painted panels depicting the expansion of Syrian refugee camps as seen from the air. This October, in a show at Galatea Fine Art in Boston's SoWa District called "Building Into Water," the artist tackles another vital political issue: the environment.



"Flamingo Isle," mixed media on canvas, 30" x 36"

The great tension in Reindorf's paintings is between human and nature; it's a dichotomy that isn't novel but into which she breathes new life. For her, the natural systems that have been disturbed by the expansion of man-made infrastructure are not passive – rather, they apply their own counter-pressure to human society in response to disturbances. Reindorf's work aims to represent this tug-of-war. This is indeed true in the case of the paintings that will show in "Building into Water." They are narrative interpretations of the coastal ecosystems of Florida devastated in recent history by the redirection of natural waterways and by runoff of fertilizers and other chemicals.

The pollution of Florida's natural aquifers has led to massive algae blooms that can cause water system toxicity. These blooms are represented in the paintings by imposing swaths of kelp green; these and other organic forms (such as concentric semi-circles resembling waves) threaten the stability of the carefully laid-out and repetitive geometries of human settlements.

Reindorf, who has worked as an architect, has derived an interest in the intersection between landscape and emotion. Her works, which she refers to as "archiscapes" often utilize motifs familiar from aerial photography, but the images are conceived in the imagination and applied to multiple panels that can be rearranged in any number of ways. The effect is to create narratives, pieces that abstract environmental processes from the landscape in which they occur.



Toxic Bloom- mixed media on canvas, 30" x 30"

The relation between human development and natural processes is represented in its full complexity by these artworks, which are built up with many layers of paint, both oil and acrylic as well as plaster and gel, often incorporating natural media like sand salt and coffee. The result is rich canvases that give the illusion of depth and movement. Reindorf's works simply must be seen in person to be truly appreciated to due to the amount of texture she gives the paintings- Digital images are inadequate representations.

The colors of the work, dominated by almost natural blues, greens, turquoises and coral red, are incredibly vivid, preventing her paintings from being relegated to the status of maps. The reactions they elicit are visceral. Reindorf cites the rich colors in the works as vestiges of her upbringing in Mexico, where her father worked as an artist.

As a believer in arts potential to lead to social change, Reindorf's politics are thorough. She is aware of the consequence of the studio practice and especially of artist propensity for wastefulness, which motivates her to paint over some of her campuses so that they can be donated for reuse.

"Building into Water" highlights works of art alive with tension and teeming with texture; they are rare in their existence at the intersection of aesthetic and political success. Keeping in mind that the situation presented in the show is dire, Reindorf's paintings themselves are beautifully provocative and demand a trip to see for yourself.

Joshua Ascherman