



## Dig a little deeper, don't be shy

Pair of exhibitions requires the viewer to stop and look

MEAGHAN BAXTER

The meaning or location of art is not always spelled out for the viewer. A little extra thought and further investigation is often required to get a full understanding of works of art, and that's exactly the point for two new solo exhibitions on display at Newzones Gallery.

*Plein-Air (Recent Landscapes)* by Peter Hoffer showcases an array of ambiguous scenery, void of any defining elements that could lead the viewer to pinpoint its exact location.

"When I started working with landscapes years ago, I was trying to make them somewhat generic so they cross over locations and they would be generic enough that people could relate to these places," says Hoffer.

Traditional landscape artwork has a tendency to focus on the pristine and picturesque, but Hoffer's work shines the spotlight on the periphery.

Hoffer has a strong background in conceptual sculpture, which is evident in the construction of his finished work. His transformation into a landscape painter was born from an exhibition in Paris.

"I guess there was an expectation that I would do something regarding nature somehow, or wildlife," he says. "When I understood that's what they were thinking, instead of getting my back up and getting somewhat

### VISUAL ARTS PREVIEW

**PETER HOFFER AND RANA ROCHAT**  
Runs until November 26  
Newzones Gallery

confrontational over that kind of expectation, I took it on."

Hoffer began using resin and varnish in the tradition of early salon paintings, where work would be lacquered with a fresh coat each night to prevent aging. He stepped away from what he describes as traditional, mediocre landscape paintings and focused on the process of the finished piece.

"I didn't want the image to distract from the material, which is the varnish and the resin and real thick canvas," Hoffer says.

Depending on the lighting, the thick coats of resin can make it difficult for viewers to clearly see Hoffer's work, requiring a shift in perspective and a more thorough investigation of the piece.

"People get frustrated, or maybe even get narcissistic and start fixing their hair," he says, adding he caught a woman applying lipstick in her reflection in one of his pieces. "The resin then acts as a barrier and that's how I look at the resin now, as a barrier that draws you in, but also keeps you out."

Also on at Newzones is Rana Rochat, making her Canadian debut with *New Work*. Much like Hoffer, her collection of abstract encaustic paintings boast a non-specific



Rana Rochat's encaustic paintings at Newzones are thickly layered, adding a sculptural element to her work.

element, requiring the viewer to decipher the works' meaning.

"The encaustic medium (hot wax painting) is unlike any medium I have ever worked with," says Rochat, who is based in Atlanta.

Working with the medium started as a love-hate relationship, she adds, due to its technical and process-oriented nature, but trial and error proved to be the key to unlocking its joys.

"I feel enough of a mastery of the medium that I can call the shots," she says.

Encaustic work requires a great deal of layering, allowing Rochat to edit her paintings during the creative process. Working with wax also adds a sculptural element to her work.

"Layering marks form a hierarchy in a way," she says. "Those that do nothing for me can recede through the layers while still playing an active role in the painting."

Rochat's work creates a swirling, twisting and luminous abstract landscape inspired by what she describes as the oxymoron of random intention. She does not label her work in any specific way in order to maintain a veil of mystery.

"I feel that by trying to convey a lot of meaning, that intuition is sacrificed," she explains. "I hope people who see my painting leave with an enjoyment of what aesthetic experience can provide."

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MARCH 2010

reviews: national

ties are as American as apple pie, pizza, bagels, and those dirty-water hot dogs they sell from pushcarts in Manhattan. Chast's characters, like most of us, feel



Roz Chast, *Excuse Cards*, 2008, ink and watercolor on paper, 11 1/2" x 8 1/2", Gerald Peters.

they are somewhere outside the norm, whatever that may be.

This exhibition of 30 color and black-and-white drawings, most smaller than a sheet of notebook paper, represented the first time that Chast has shown her work in Santa Fe. Surprisingly, though her works are so indelibly identified with the printed page, they functioned quite well in the gallery setting, overcoming traditional biases about the categories of high and low art.

Muddling through a baffling world, Chast's characters offer wry, hopeful, and downright ridiculous reactions to everyday life in all its tedium and frustrations. Often featuring multiple panels on a single theme, the cartoons find humor in aberration. *Slightly Irregular Books* (2000) touts discounted copies of *Goldilocks and the Four*

*Bears*—"After a couple of readings, you won't even notice him." And who couldn't use one of her *Excuse Cards* (2008), including #38, "Can't start till refrigerator is clean." —Kathryn M Davis

## Rana Rochat

Winston Wächter Fine Art  
Seattle

Like many contemporary painters who work in encaustic, Rana Rochat makes paintings that are primarily concerned with the medium itself. Her panels focus on various pleasant but generic visual effects: translucent layers of form and color, luscious surfaces, ethereal depths, and subtle textures. What sets Rochat apart from other encaustic enthusiasts is her command of apparently spontaneous and slightly goofy calligraphic gestures, all carefully disciplined and laid down with traditional formal logic.

Earlier in the decade, her compositions were relatively busy, filled with clusters of spidery marks and enigmatic signs distributed more or less evenly over the surface. Some depicted schematic vessels catching or missing falling drops of liquid. The paintings in this exhibition (all 2009) were dominated by large looped and spiral forms floating over impres-

sionistic backgrounds. The loops, sometimes linear and sometimes more painterly, often behave like abstract cartoons, invading the picture plane from the corners, bumping into one another, or exiting to the side. This animation was especially well conveyed in a grouping of nine 16-by-16-inch panels. Each painting is a separate entity, but the ensemble clarified the character roles certain forms tend to play in Rochat's pictorial scripts.

Other paintings in the exhibition were larger in scale, with doodlelike lines or simple shapes gathered on the right and left sides or in the four corners of the canvas. The centers were often left open, drawing attention to the layered atmospheric spaces behind the calligraphic spirals. The artist is especially interested in how marks are imbued with "vitality and elusive meaning" through their interactions, and this show confirmed her success in revitalizing her chosen medium.

—Patricia Failing

## 'Counterpoint 2009, The Beginning'

Togonon  
San Francisco

Inaugurating a new exhibition series on West Coast photographers, this show focused on the question "Is there a West Coast perspective that can be

captured by present-day photography?" Judging from the work here, mostly by recent graduates from Bay Area M.F.A. programs, the answer is no—experimentation reigns.

For his series of digital collages, Jackson Patterson embedded smaller images in the centers of larger ones, leaving detectable seams along some of the edges. In *Aging Wonder* (2009), a weary woman with a lined face and a blank stare sits in a chair. Her close surroundings shift into the great outdoors, and in the process transform the mood of the work. The swaybacked, weathered white horse with



Rana Rochat, *W212*, 2009, encaustic on panel, 42" x 48", Winston Wächter Fine Art.

From an essay by Jerry Cullum, senior editor of Art Papers:

... these paintings are successful in creating a visual dialogue or conversation among their individual elements, or what conventional aesthetic theory would call complex composition; this vital balance and tension takes place within a richly layered encaustic surface that takes full advantage of how the colored wax is laid down in layers.

Rochat builds a sense of sumptuous depth into her work through the gradual addition of images and textures to an initially stark and stripped-down groundwork. Stain-like semi-transparency comes into the picture here, and lends a sense of something far more deeply interfused (to borrow Wordsworth's familiar description of intuitive emotional resonance) to the viewer's reflective meditations. But the meditations wouldn't be possible if the paintings didn't succeed so fully as physical objects.

Excerpts from a Review by art critic Fred Koeppel,  
February 22, 2008:

The universe of Rochat's work is one of flux and flow; the paintings resemble charts that might approximate the famous "uncertainty principle" or a slide seen under a microscope of active yet invisible and incomprehensible life-forms...

This work is abstract, but not arbitrary. The encaustic medium does not countenance accidents, and Rochat's marks and swirls, her conjunctions of swathes and lines of color convey an attention to detail worthy of a goldsmith...Rochat's work is sophisticated and confident, filled with tension and inner contradiction...