



## 'NightLites' at Sabina Lee Gallery

In many ways, recent art in Los Angeles has favored the large, the bright and the bold. *NightLites*, a group show of six—Wendy Adest, Jon Elliott, Samantha Fields, Niki Lederer, Mery Lynn McCorkle and Andra Samelson—at Sabina Lee Gallery, provides an enigmatic respite. Each of the artists has an idiosyncratic vision of the theme—night, shadow, a light in the dark—and of their media. Though less than fully realized in places, the exhibition is characterized by an overall sense of individuality. Group shows, especially themed ones, can invite the unenlightened impulse to compare—big, small/like, don't/like, dark/light, but

*NightLites* is different. The broad range of materials and the fact that the artists genuinely address the theme, lend a democratic spirit to the show.

Adest's installation, *Fireflies*, expresses a tension between fancy and danger that prevails in the show. A series of faint lines—part magic circle, part bull's eye—encircle moths and fireflies on dark, hazy spheres that float on the wall like a stream of bubbles. Portals into an obscure fog that seems ordinary at one glance and otherworldly the next, the circles are rimmed by a neon glow from the transparent Plexi bases. Adest's use of hand coloring in combination with computer-generated imagery is beautifully handled, at once elegant and uncanny.

Circles are echoed, and then endlessly repeated, stretched and otherwise distorted, in seven remarkable paintings by McCorkle.

Layer upon layer of variations of gold, magenta, blue form and reform into circles, parts of circles, patterns making circles. I would locate them somewhere between the middle of a crowded, pulsing dance club and the point just in front of a swarm of lights. The circles and ovals are made up of repeated shapes that often resemble, in an odd twist, small, plastic fingernails. Pills and flowers, fractured rainbows and broken glass, there's something black in all this brilliance. Though Fred Tomaselli comes to mind, Yayoi Kusama is a more accurate a reference; there is an insistence and anxiety to McCorkle's work that sizzles delightfully through all that structured geometry.

Samelson's *Blue Prints* share a similar, if toned down, obsession. The huge, carbon copy-blue image, is eerie. From across the room, it looks like a hugely magnified fingerprint and closer inspection

reveals a web of intricate ballpoint traceries. It's as if the universe were contained on the head of a pin, or the thumb of a giant.

Perspective shifts again in Fields's *Come and See*, where a miniature person, a deer, a bear and a mouse attend a tiny, lone campfire in the bottom corner of the canvas. Dwarfed by a massive, smoky sky, the fire and its attendants seem to be a mirage in the desert of a very long night.

Two sconces by Lederer have a garage sale funkiness that is eclectic and fun; if the night was getting creepy, these hold up a winking light. It could be the limited format of a group show, but the works of Fields and Lederer share a preliminary quality, like sketches of a larger idea.

Three paintings by Elliott veer from the fantastical to the bleak and highlight the welcome eccentricity that reverberates through *NightLites*. Similar in concept to Nigel Cooke's massive, post-apocalyptic pieces, these small mixed-media paintings share the spirit of Philip Guston's later work. Lines scratched into glossy, black enamel surfaces trace outlines of a city that forms here and disintegrates there, marred by course, cement-like patches of polymer and stippled with cascades of pastel dots forming ephemeral clouds out of refuse.

Maybe I'm still reeling from all those big, bright paint fumes swirling around town, but the work of these artists seems to speak to our precarious and stifling times. Like an unexpected heartbeat of the metropolis at 3 A.M., they are dark and leering, intoxicating and fanciful.

—Annie Buckley

*NightLites* closed in January at Sabina Lee Gallery, Los Angeles.

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From top: Mery Lynn McCorkle, *Cured*, 2006, acrylic on panel, 30" x 22-1/2"; Wendy Adest, *Fireflies*, 2004, photo print on Plexiglas, hand colored with charcoal, acrylic wash; Samantha Fields, detail of *Come and See*, 2005, acrylic on canvas, 72" x 48", at Sabina Lee Gallery, Los Angeles.

