

THE KENNETT PAPER

Avy Claire paintings floating above the endless sea

By R.B. STRAUSS

Can there be a more evocative, mysterious title for an art exhibition than "SeaSmoke?" It conjures up vast expanses of water that reach to the horizon, down to underwater crags and crevices, and on up to the heavens. Painter Avy Claire offers a suite of paintings at Pentimenti Gallery (www.pentimentigallery.com), 133 N. Third St. in Philadelphia's Old City neighborhood. The exhibition runs through Dec. 31 and is definitely worth the road trip.

All the paintings are titled "SeaSmoke," plus the date that they were created. Further, the composition of each one is identical: two discs span the width of the piece, with two more of equal size directly below them. This similarity enhances the meditative effect, as Claire's palette is a collection of pale shades that span the spectrum, though the discs are to a one a blue just this side of the sky.

Of course, the immediate feel of these blue discs is that those below are reflections of the top pair as floating on the surface of the sea, round billows of sea smoke rise from the surface. Claire's sea is a calm, nurturing body of water filled with prominent yet poetic swirls of green and yellow. Another element here is a grid-like

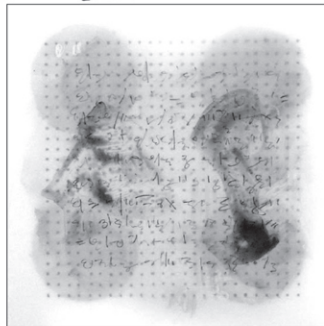
series of dots that could be the work of some cartographer mapping sea and sky alike, their emphasis enhanced by a scrawl of fragmentary marks that are like letters from a secret alphabet noting an exact scene.

The similarity of the work, the rhythm from one painting to the next, offers a sense that it is a single location that has been recorded over time, and this span is nothing short of epochal rather than collapsed into a frame of only hours.

Each painting could well be a still image from a film. Indeed, I would love to see Claire create a kinetic excursion featuring this work, as it would be a languorous voyage focusing on one site to offer how seas move through the eons.

On an initial visual level, the work

Review



Courtesy Photo

"SeaSmoke" is the title of all the pieces in Avy Claire's exhibit at Pentimenti Gallery on Third Street in Philadelphia. The show continues through Dec. 31.

is all the more impressive through the very process of painting. They are to a one small pieces resonant with nuance, and all are mixed media on Mylar, which lends them depth as each touch of color descends deeper into the sea, while perspective of sorts is maintained through the gradations of color paced by image. There is also a connection here to prints, in the precision of how the work flows.

"SeaSmoke" is a revelatory collection of art that breaks new ground within the interface where its abstract impulse is confluent with its "representational" aesthetic echo. While looking forward, it also looks back to classic Abstract Expressionism, primarily the meditative qualities of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. The difference here is in the size of the work itself. Both others worked not just large but massive, yet the scale afforded by Claire, plus the harmony and improvisational texture throughout her oeuvre, is anchored in an intimate sublimity whose ambience via its small dimensions proves ever hypnotic on an individual and deeply personal level.