

MUSEUMS & GALLERIES



Alex Zecca's "April 10, 2009."

Immanent Domain

A Berkeley show examines abstraction's spiritual side.

Modernist abstraction is usually seen in formalist terms — art for art's sake, devoid of outside referents. This idea, tirelessly promulgated after World War II by critic Clement Greenberg, followed the traditional Western preference for the ideal and abstract over the messy and mortal; it also fit nicely into the new secular, suburban consumerist world. By the 1970s, however, such aesthetic purism was seen as patriarchal puritanism by dissident postmodernists. The artist and writer Deborah Koppman (whose essay "Thou Art" critiques PoMo with equal rigor), asked, in *Reclaiming the Spiritual in Art*: "What if the spiritual were defined in terms of immanence rather than transcendence? What if physicality were seen as embodying spirituality, rather than as being separate from it? What if the divine were believed to be immanent in nature, and if the earth were conceived of as a physical and spiritual being, possessed of intelligence and wisdom?"

Shock of the old! Abstraction began a century ago with utopian motivations, as avant-garde artists sought to create personal yet universal aesthetic religions. *Metaphysical Abstraction*, a show featuring works by well-known local artists Jamie Brunson, Freddy Chandra, David Ivan Clark, Lori del Mar, David O. Johnson, David King, Keira Kotler, Michelle Mansour, Jenn Shifflet, Hadi Tabatabai, and Alex Zecca, attempts to correct the intellectual and philosophical denaturing of abstraction over the past three generations by expropriating undermanned Formalist-held territory. The show's small catalogue, with essays by art historian Mark Levy, is helpful in explaining context. While curators Brunson and Mansour find formal commonalities in the art — "luminosity and atmosphere, structure, spatial depth, and a sense of location; shifts from microcosmic to macrocosmic scale; formal elements including line and color; layering and repetition; refined surface qualities; and meticulous facture" — they also see the works acting as portals between different realms — as liminal, transitional spaces, or spiritual catalysts.

A few highlights: Brunson's shimmering painting "Weave," its nearly invisible lattice a presence without center or boundary; Clark's landscape paintings on stainless steel, all horizon and sky, emerging from lengthy painting and sanding, deposition and removal; Johnson's minimalist sculptures, Zen paradoxes — heavy concrete cubes surmounted by fragile, luminous handles; King's collages, linking microcosm and macrocosm; Mansour's iconic depiction of interpenetrating matter and energy; Shifflet's dreamlike dawn-of-time pondscares; Tabatabai's immaculately crafted grids of wood, thread, paint, and wax; and Zecca's colored-ink mandalas. Koppman, again: "To be human means to be embodied; this life, this body, this earth, is in itself sacred." *Metaphysical Abstraction* runs through November 29 at **Berkeley Art Center** (1275 Walnut St., Berkeley). 510-644-6893 or BerkeleyArtCenter.org

— DeWitt Cheng

ART GALLERIES

21 Grand Gallery/Performance Space. "Wrong!" 21 Grand presents its first-ever juried exhibition, with jurors Svea Linn Vezone and Misako Inaoka making the selections. Theme looks at ethical misdeeds and wrongdoings in "the decade of 'wrong.'" Through Nov. 1. 416 25th St., Oakland, 510-444-7263, 21Grand.org.

33 Revolutions Record Shop & Cafe. **The Mystery of Vision: Sustainable Aesthetic Ingenuity** Herk Schusteff presents paintings of utopian landscapes and "small footprint eco-logic." Through Oct. 31. 10086 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito, 510-898-1836, 33Revolutions.com.

57th Street Gallery. Jazz Art Lavinille Aber, Valery Kagoukin, Mami Mutrux, Russell Kidd, Ronald Blodgett, and Marcel Hinesand present paintings of John Coltrane, Billie Holiday, Quincy Jones, Dave Brubeck, and other jazz musicians. Dray Wilmore., Receptions Sat-Sun., Oct. 24-25; Nov. 21-22; Dec. 19-20 with refreshments and live jazz. Through Dec. 20. 5701 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, 510-654-6974, 57thStreetGallery.com.

ABCO Warehouse Space. Challenge of Champions Community art exhibit commenting on Oakland Homicides. Through Dec. 28. 3135 Filbert St., Emeryville, ABCOArtSpace.com.

Alameda Historical Museum and Art Gallery. Faces and Places Solo show features paintings of old Alameda postcards, plus pen and ink, charcoal, oil and acrylics. Through Oct. 31. 2324 Alameda Ave., Alameda, 510-748-0796, AlamedaMuseum.org.

Art@theOakBook. Improvised Branches Drawing exhibition curated by the Oak Book's art critic Theo Konrad Auer, featuring work by Mark Dukes, Chris Russell, Crystal Morey, Kevin Earl Taylor, Nancy Chan, Daniel Healey, Dave Higgins, Michael Patton, Obi Kaufmann, and Jake Watling. Through Oct. 31. 423 Water St., Oakland, 510-282-2139.

Bedford Gallery. San Francisco Arts Commission Art on Market Street Project Bedford Gallery pays homage to a successful, long-running public art project. Through Nov. 15. 1601 Civic Dr. (Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts), Walnut Creek, 925-295-1417, BedfordGallery.org.

Berkeley Art Center. Metaphysical Abstraction: Contemporary Approaches to Spiritual Content Group show curated by Jamie Brunson and Michelle Mansour. Through Nov. 29. 1275 Walnut St. (in Live Oak Park), Berkeley, 510-644-6893, BerkeleyArtCenter.org.

Berkeley Art Museum. The Abu Ghraib Series Works by Colombian painter Fernando Botero. Through Feb. 7, 2010. 2625 Durant Ave. (UC Berkeley campus), Berkeley, 510-642-0808, BAMFPA.berkeley.edu.

Berkeley Travel Company. Pete Najarian Showcasing his paintings. Through Oct. 31. 1301 California St., Berkeley.

Blankspace. This is Not My Beautiful Life Two-person show with Michael Hall and Daniel Healey. Opening Reception: Sat., Oct. 17, 6-9 p.m. First Friday Reception: Nov. 6, 7-10 p.m. Through Nov. 15. 6608 San Pablo Ave., Emeryville, 510-547-6608, BlankspaceGallery.com.

Cafe Valparaiso. Group show by Kolectivo 9/11 Chilean artists living in the US explore corrosion of civil liberties and the US military industrial complex in their work. Through Oct. 31. 3105 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, 510-841-3800, www.lapena.org/cafeTOC.html.

Cal State East Bay University Art Gallery. Spiritual Vessels: Chinese Teaware Selection of works from major collections by artists of the Zisha tradition. Through Dec. 3. 25800 Carlos Bee Blvd. (CSUEB campus), Hayward, 510-885-3299, Class.CSUEastBay.edu/artgallery.

Chandra Cerrito Contemporary. Thérèse Lahaie: Longing for the Background Through Nov. 21. 25 Grand Ave., Oakland, 415-577-7537, ChandraCerrito.com.

Craft and Cultural Arts Gallery. Spontaneous Conviction: Artwork from the National Institute of Art & Disabilities Featuring work by more than 25 NIAD artists in various media, including fiber art, jewelry, mixed media, paintings, and sculpture. Through Oct. 30. 1515 Clay St. (State of California Office Building atrium), Oakland, 510-622-8190, OaklandCulturalArts.org.

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