

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

Nathan Pankratz: Calamity Jane
March 2012

You've traveled a long distance, to be present in the midst of the oncoming tempest. The devastation has called you, an alluring invitation, to witness a brief glimpse of beauty at the onset of the upheaval. Nathan Pankratz's recent paintings seek to capture that momentary awe, a jumble of amazement, reverence, and trepidation as we stand at the precipice amongst the chaos of natural disaster. You, the viewer, are caught in the whirlwind, balancing on unsteady boulders, stepping off the edge or falling through into the crevasse, yet all the while experiencing a rousing sensation of clarity within the pandemonium.

This new series of paintings that describe explosive, shattering bursts of action and reaction are at first and foremost luscious eye candy begging to be caressed. The painted gyrations generate like organic growth patterns from one focal point with variations of sweeping colors, shaded forms, gradient tones, and shimmering textures. When I first stood before *Need to Break this Cycle*, the largest work in the series, I felt as if I had been transported, my feet shifted onto the sand colored ground as my eyes traveled from the playful cloud forms above into the spiraling swirls of blue, gray, white and even pink layers of paint. Here Pankratz has created a turbine motion that simultaneously draws us into the force while appearing to blow right past.

Pankratz has consistently been interested in the exploration of surface through a variety of layering techniques. Earlier works such as *Rosebud* and *Flowers Cover All*, both from 2008, rely on collaged elements applied in layers then sanded through to reveal a history of the process. The application of thick acrylic paint in this current series is texturally reminiscent of the bright vinyl shapes from the Colorforms toy of the 1950's. Here rather than stripping or sanding away the details, these compositions are built up in broad gestures by overlapping translucent layers applied with rubber squeegees, palette knives and airbrush.

Nathan Pankratz has intentionally utilized plastic forms and vibrant colors in each of these paintings in order to communicate his meaning. The works possess a playful ambiguity suggesting both animated film stills and graphic scenes from the nightly news. One such image is *Smoked*, with it's depth of seemingly endless layers of puffs of smoke. This piece gives a nod to Pop Art as it takes liberties from Lichtensteins' POW images, yet stops short of adding in the figures or word bubbles. Instead we get all the explosive action.

The content of the Calamity Jane series repeatedly reminded me of the final scenes from Julian Schanbel's 2007 film *The Diving Bell and The Butterfly*, in which the shattering collapse of glacial cliffs crash in slow motion into the icy waters. Pankratz is in pursuit of these the fleeting natural wonders. He wants us to experience the beauty within the tragedy, to freeze it in an unending moment. In this series he skillfully approaches the theme with an impish wink so as to curtail our inevitable trepidation.

-- Nancy Agati is a Philadelphia based artist who has steadily exhibited her work throughout Philadelphia and nationally. She has had solo exhibitions at Pentimenti Gallery, Philadelphia; Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts, Harrisburg; Abington Art Center, Jenkintown, PA; and ARC Gallery and Educational Foundation, Chicago, IL. Her work has been included in group exhibitions from Vermont to New Mexico. Many recent exhibitions have offered the artist an opportunity to explore mediums outside of the realm of painting such as, video, sculpture, environmental art and site-specific installation.

Agati was a recipient of a Windows of Opportunity Award from the Leeway Foundation in 2000 and was granted an Artist in Residence at the Santa Fe Art Institute, Santa Fe, NM in 2004. In December 2007 she received a Master of Fine Arts degree from The University of The Arts in Philadelphia.

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