

# BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

Rebecca Rutstein "Love and Subduction"

"Love and Subduction", the title of Rebecca Rutstein's exhibition, is a clever combination of words that speak to the overriding theme of this group of new paintings: narrative conveyed through the visual languages of science and personal iconography. Love is the easy part—it is manifested through Rutstein's love of peak experience, landscape, place, and things. The paintings were the result of a residency at the Banff Center in the Canadian Rockies, an inspirational place where the artist became awestruck by the geological and topographical sublime. The love of the landscape is highlighted in the artist's almost obsessive attention to rendering it through a number of representational modes including scientific diagrams and illustration, mapping, and choice of color. Quirky images of objects meaningful to the artist share space with landscape and diagrammatic imagery. Love is also pronounced in a universe of pet icons. The artist's love of shoes comes forth in several paintings. Canopy beds, where love is made, are another reoccurring motif. But what on earth is "Subduction?" Subduction is actually a geologic term that describes a phenomenon in which dense oceanic plates of earth are pushed under lighter continental plates. At the meeting of these plates, fault lines and volcanoes form, with often dramatic results on the earth's surface. As in human relationships, the relationships between terrestrial plates can often prove volatile, or at least exciting.

The intensity of the light experienced at the high altitude of the Canadian Rockies inspired Rutstein to embrace a bright palette, using vividly colored grounds on which more detailed imagery is painted and screen printed. Color deployed across the picture plane, screen-printed images, digitally-designed drawings, and use of acrylic paint marks a departure from her previous work. The tight, graphic quality of these paintings is altogether different from her earlier more gestural and expressionistic oil painting style. One might guess that the flatness and crispness of these paintings is attributable to Rutstein's "other" profession as a graphic designer. Rutstein's colorful palette and use of "girly" motifs also imbues the work with a degree of feminine sensibility that counterbalances the masculine underpinnings of the scientific enterprise—scientific visual representation, as discussed above, serves as a central element in this body of work.

In effect, Rutstein constructs loosely woven narratives based on the metaphorical play between the forces that catalyze change in her daily life and the more powerful (yet more slow moving) geologic forces at work in nature. Her project is ultimately existential: to find meaning in the relationship between humble humanness and the overwhelming power, complexity, and history of planet earth. Rutstein never falls into the binary trap of the nature/culture divide. As she has pointed out, the Canadian Rockies are composed of layers of decomposed organisms deposited over 500 million years ago. This mountain range is literally made up of our ancestors. We, therefore, are inextricably a part of the ground we tread upon.

Alex Baker, 2005  
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