

“Bumpy”

at POST, 10 September–14 October

“Painting Beyond the Idea”

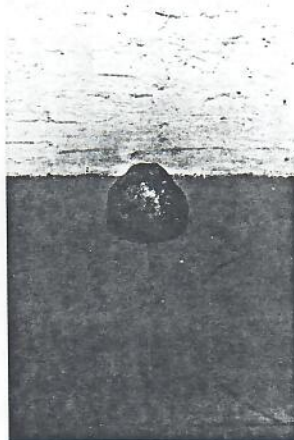
at MANNY SILVERMAN, 16 September–28 October

Along with a recent flurry of attention in the art press as painting is (once again) exhumed, revived, and pronounced viable, two exhibitions of contemporary abstract painting by Los Angeles artists serve pointed notice that good work has always continued, regardless of the vagaries of critical fashion. The recurrent myth of painting’s irrelevance, demise, and return has become a cultural allegory of death and resurrection: If painting is indeed dead, then painters are necromantic morticians who make the corpse a thing of exquisite beauty. Michael Fried once described the condition of painting as a state without duration, “the secreting of a continuous and perpetual present.” Straightforward and without irony, the paintings in these two exhibits provide a sense of the urgency and sincerity that informs these painters’ appeal to the beautiful. Despite their different premises, both shows have an exuberant, eclectic air about them, careening from manic, giddy displays of color to delicate, contemplative passages. Though the geography of the two galleries—POST embedded in an industrial-zone loft in downtown Los Angeles, Manny Silverman in tony Westside digs—might suggest a neat dichotomy of funky and finished, three artists have work in both shows. Overall, however, the POST show, entitled “Bumpy,” is more raw and challenging, as befits a venue that seeks to provide opportunities for experimental work.

“Bumpy” explicitly turns on the axis of the physical surface: Paintings were

selected for their, well, bumpiness. These are paintings you want to touch, tickle, and caress. The resultant grouping revels in gleeful topographies that unapologetically wallow in painfully bright acidic yellows and bilious tones of green. Much of this work evokes messy bodily associations, suggesting greatly enlarged openings, cells, and fluids. Nancy Evans’ *Untitled* (1995) takes up this issue with fetid, clotted colors, while David Lloyd’s undulating phosphorescent extrusion seems sealed by its own secretions. Leonard Bravo lets his *Untitled #13* (1995) go a little more over the top, its eruptive purple ooze really pushing the membrane. Taking a different tack, gallery director Habib Kheradyar’s *Painting Without Canvas* (painted 1988, scraped 1991) is at once formally goofy and conceptually loaded. Made of the compressed remains of paint scraped from a large canvas and rolled into a ball on the floor, it evokes humor with its squat, lumpen proportions, but intrigues with its sense of collapsed temporality, as though the painting had fallen victim to its own gravitational field.

Across town, “Painting Beyond the Idea” is more cool and clean; the larger space allows for a greater range of scale and pacing, albeit with fewer rough edges. Included is work from several different generations of painters, though the usual suspects don’t really give us anything fresh; the best is from the relative newcomers. Curated by art dealer Bennett Roberts for its breadth rather than theme (thus, “beyond the idea”), the mix of painters is fairly successful because of the discipline of the work, and



Roberts’ judicious selection. Dennis Hollingsworth’s *Nevada (Wanderlust)* (1995) is a luminous epiphany of translucence, soaring with a visual optimism not seen often enough lately. The spare poetics of Michelle Fiero’s *The Forgiving One* (1995) show a refined conflation of the intimate and monumental relationships that live within her paintings. Pushing paint into frankly sculptural territory, Fiero’s dioramas maintain a delicate balance between poignancy and wackiness without looking forced. David Lloyd’s *Genus* (1995) looks like an image from a madcap microscope slide, as though excretory organs were cross-sectioned onto canvas. Complementing the large paintings are several works on paper, of which Pauline Stella Sanchez’s

I’m the Queen of the Pawns (1995) is a subtle gem, with baroque skeins of inked circles and loops that coax the eye into their labyrinth.

The conviction and authority of the paintings in both shows is compelling; one wishes only that there could be more, and more often. Whether they are a harbinger of renewed attention to painting in Los Angeles, or just another anomalous twitch of its beautiful corpse, these exhibitions testify to the persistent vigor of abstract painting here.

Kerry Kugelman is an artist and writer based in Los Angeles.

David Lloyd
Genus, 1995
Oil on canvas
84" x 90"

Habib Kheradyar
Painting Without Canvas, 1988/1991
Oil, wax, tar
8" diameter