



Nancy Monk, *Scott Tree*, acrylic on photograph, 10" x 4", 2008. Courtesy Artist/Craig Krull Gallery.

Nancy Monk: *Painting Over*

Craig Krull Gallery, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica

Painting Over was an invigorating excursion into Nancy Monk's delightfully tree-filled imagination. Her magical mixed-media-collaged and painted portraits of trees winked, smiled, and sometimes even giggled. Her heartfelt reverence for nature was obvious, yet the work remained free of saccharin sentimentality or goey romanticism. With her penchant for endowing her subjects with expressive patterns and charming personalities, Monk could have been creating characters in fanciful vignettes co-created by Calder, Klee, or Kandinsky.

The icon of the tree is laden with immediate inferences, but Monk forged each representation with a clean slate. As in the Bonsai tradition, her formation was guided by intuition. Monk was able to bare the inner tree of her subjects — sometimes quiet and simple, other times jubilant in the complex patterning. Dish towels or old bank bags provided some of the canvases and imagery's underpinnings; others were embellished with hand-stitching, keepsakes, sparkly trinkets, or bedecked with buttons painted with faces and gleeful smiles. The choices and commingling of materials determined the tenor of each piece and all the hidden materials provided codes and clues but no overweening message.

Architectural configurations and grids provided several of the tree's armatures, as did photographs of family and friends. Monk also incorporated pieces of earlier work in the foundations of the new, with bits and pieces gracefully incorporated, obscured, and partially secreted behind the branches. The pieces articulated accumulations of thoughts and moments, collapsing any sense of "then" and "now" as a continuum. Refreshingly removed from overwrought didacticism or self-indulgent wistfulness, *Painting Over's* blithe mood paid homage to beauty for beauty's sake.

— Ashley McLean Emenegger

Karen Kauffman: *The Rhapsody of Always-Is*

Cal Poly Pomona Downtown Center Gallery, Pomona

There has been a shift in the force that moves painter Karen Kauffman, and it was clearly visible in her recent exhibition *The Rhapsody of Always-Is*. This five-year survey of Kauffman's paintings and monotypes presented two distinctly different bodies of work, separated not by medium but by visual choices in her painting process, choices that have become noticeably clearer. Kauffman's paintings represent her inner struggle with issues of control — to control the paint or to let it control her. Her older paintings are composed of quick, thick, compulsively forced brushstrokes restrained by her wrist. These canvases comprise a series of shapes repeated and compartmentalized within multiple layers of paint. The darker works become so saturated that only a change in light reveals small surprises in the underpainting. Such a natural-toned palette set off with the occasional complementary color may be safe and attractive, but hardly represents this artist's free spirit.

Both old work and new are well balanced and demonstrate Kauffman's understanding of color and space. Her newest work, however, is open and gestural in a way that indicates she has stopped second-guessing her intuitive nature. The shapes in *Diurnal Winds*, which seem applied with unrestricted movement, are merely suggested and are left alone to move freely within the painting. The new work is deliberate and controlled but does not appear rigid or forced; it maintains the delicacy of this artist's high-wire act between perceptive insight and rational process.

— Andi Campognone



Karen Kauffman, *Emotive*, oil & acrylic on paper, 60" x 40", 2008. Courtesy of the artist.