

ART REVIEW : Looking down, thinking up - Julika Lackner presents look at urbanscapes as viewed from an air traveler's perspective

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JULIKA LACKNER, 'TRANSCENDENTAL REPRESENTATIONS'

When: through April 30

Where: UCSB's Faculty Club

Hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

Information: 893-3096, www.faculty-club.ucsb.edu, www.julikalackner.com

In young artist Julika Lackner's impressive exhibition "Transcendental Representations," spreading itself around the walls of the Charles Moore-designed UCSB Faculty Club, the artist has opted to look down on the world, but only literally. As artistic ideas go, hers is a simple yet surprisingly fertile concept and perceptual shift, turning aerial views of the earth below into the stuff of painterly expressivity and, secondarily, ecological commentary.

Peering down on the world, from a direct overhead perspective, is a familiar exercise for post-20th century humans with air travel experience, but Lackner, 28, takes it a few steps further. In her paintings, the world below is reduced to a geometric, semi-abstract field, built up from real world elements. The real, the metaphysical and the painterly craftily merge.

In several paintings, including the dazzling "Adrift" and "Where the Summer Spends the Winter," bodies of water are juxtaposed with housing developments, which have been reduced to rectilinear clumps of data and shapes. The housing areas become busy, right-angled and humanized terrain nuzzling up against the wild, untamable oceanic expanse.

Other paintings survey pure snatches of the urban landscape, made to appear harmless and tidy from on high. Neatly placed rectangles in grids are coated with greenery and softened by the vaporous clouds between the airborne observer and the observed scene on the ground. Pollution, venality and other ground-level sins seem far away.

In Lackner's show, which includes several large and formidable canvases dramatically displayed along one wall, the artist takes heed of the importance of variety within the self-imposed limitation of her concept, employing diverse angles, subjects and palettes.

On one extreme, "Two Blues" is a loose and nearly abstracted painting, consisting only of a deep sky blue hue, tickled by puffs of cumulus. By significant contrast, the sizable painting called "Afloat" is anything but flotation in spirit. It's a depiction of a marina scene, with its congregation of boats, buildings, parked cars and other man-wrought objects, adding up to a polyrhythmic racket for the eyes.

Although the temptation may exist to read Lackner's body of work as a more-or-less direct indictment of the encroachment involving man's doing — and undoing — upon nature, as represented by these two contrasting paintings, such a response would be overly simplistic and misguided. In a sense, she is playing the non-judgmental, objective observer, presiding over the casa of the strange interaction between nature and civilization, from a window-seat perch. Once on the ground, the discovery and transformation process continues, in the contemplative confines of a studio and a painter's brain.

At Julika Lackner's show, "Transcendental Representations," on exhibit at UCSB's Faculty Club, is (clockwise, from top left): "Two Blues," "Afloat," "Adrift" and "Where the Summer Spends the Winter." The show hangs through April.

COURTESY OF JULIKA LACKNER