

PREVIEWS OF EXHIBITIONS

IDEAL IMPURITY: STEVE CRUQUI, DAVID PERRY, AND MARY SHERWOOD

(Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions [LACE], Downtown) *Ideal Impurity* is a three-person show featuring paintings by Steve Crique and Mary Sherwood, and furniture by David Perry. But what is *Ideal Impurity*? The works are not about issues of impurity--rather they become a model for "the other," something that is unexpected, out of the ordinary, perhaps twisted but not necessarily impure. When viewed in this way, the trio of artists enhance each other. They share a certain interest in subverting a given, whether it is a found object (Perry), a pre-existing painting or diagram (Sherwood), or Los Angeles' utopian architecture (Crique).

All three artists are manipulators. They modify a known within contemporary culture--be it a chair or a fable or a building type--altering it to fit within their framework. Each works with a specific set of parameters in order to present their eccentric take on the world. It is obvious that these three artists take pleasure in image- and object-making. They are serious about their endeavors and the message they are communicating, yet their pursuits do not lack humor.

David Perry's furniture at first glance seems awkwardly functional. He uses everyday objects such as chairs and tables, altering them in such a way that they are no longer really functional. They become sculptures. Perry works instinctually, turning conventional objects into surreal structures

with dreamlike qualities. Yet they never give up their thing-ness. What is interesting is what else they become and how their original construction is altered. By taking things apart and reassembling them into something else, Perry comments on the conventionality of form. The results here are witty and delightfully elegant. In *Red Chair* a standard red vinyl kitchen chair has been given a rocking chair base. Yet rather than sit parallel, the legs cross in the middle, making it an awkward ride. Likewise, when a picnic table is put on rockers it becomes difficult, but not impossible, to eat. In *Settee* the backs and legs of three wooden chairs are intertwined. The resulting object, a three-seater, is more interesting to look at than to use.

Perry's interest in furniture is similar to Steven Crique's interest in architecture. Crique's colorful abstract paintings are drawn from local structures along with 1950s era patterns and colors. He paints in a flat, deadpan style in which shapes are silhouetted against a ground. Although some of Crique's paintings reference the landscape, no real space is defined.

In the *Primordial Fixtures* series a single element is placed on a pole and floats in an ambiguous painted space that could be sky or could simply be color. One object could be a garage. Another a satellite dish. A third might be a figure of some sort. Each object is contained within a rectangular space which is then surrounded by a fluted

frame that has been painted a solid color.

All of Crique's work is given this framing element. Sometimes it is a solid color, in other paintings it is decorated with stripes or dots. Most of these elements, abstract geometric shapes that they are, appear to look like something: Rectangles become buildings, towers of dots become trees. Crique presents nature and architecture in its minimal form. He reduces the landscape to a series of shapes and colors. Although these paintings could be seen as simple abstractions, they are more aptly regarded as signs for something else.

Mary Sherwood re-invents history. Her paintings depict animals based on old drawings from pre-scientific sources. These animals are then placed in a landscape and given a context that relates a narrative fable. Sherwood's paintings are not merely illustrations of tales, for she twists the stories, offering a postmodern interpretation in both formal and intellectual terms. Her painted landscapes are a pastiche of styles, drawing from pre-modern and contemporary sources. The works themselves are lush and beautifully painted. Yet Sherwood masks the detailed landscape work to a degree with a plexiglass veil that contains an abstract pattern.

Responsibility of the Gifts Received is a painting of two monkeys. The image was taken from an old book about understanding nature. Sherwood was interested in the monkeys because of their genetic link to man. In this painting she chains them together. They are caught both in the painted image and as genetic inferiors. But this is not enough; rather than simply represent the old, and make historical paintings, she adds the geometric element, catapulting the paintings into the postmodern arena, where the discussion of geometry is given a social context.

Animals and geometry coexist in all of these paintings. In *World of Change* a lizard is posed in a barren landscape as a volcano erupts. The lizard says "sorry." Sorry for what? Sorry to whom?

Sherwood's paintings are layered with both the history of art and the

development of science, specifically theories of evolution. This is fascinating as well as beautiful work.

Perhaps her intent, as well as that of the other two artists, can best be summarized in *The Dog and the Shadow*. Based on the fable of the dog who sees its own shadow in a pond and wants the shadow's bone rather than the one he has. Thinking it is real, the dog drops his bone while reaching for his reflection. Sherwood sees this fable as a metaphor for painting. Can one represent nature in painting? Can it ever be real? Like Sherwood, Perry and Crique are interested in issues of representation. As the curators have stated, "their art exhibits a crossbreed of pop sentiment and Gothic affect, taking the too-familiar formal conventions of architecture, landscape paintings and furniture, and driving them toward subtle eccentricity."

Jody Zellen



Mary Sherwood, "World of Change", painting. Photo: Dgnan Borisov