



Artists at Winston Wächter gallery construct enticing ‘Summer Dreams’

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1 of 4 | Electric Coffin, installation image, 2018, various media, from the "Summer Dreams" exhibition at Winston Wächter Fine Art. (Courtesy of Winston Wächter Fine Art)

Artists in Winston Wächter’s current show construct light-infused, dreamlike visions of "Summer Dreams." But there’s also a feverish focus on exuberant color, artifice-laden compositions and perceptual plays that slip back and forth across the thresholds between reality and fantasy, nature and culture.

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By [Gayle Clemans](#)

Special to The Seattle Times

Exhibition review

What do “summer dreams” look like for you? In the Pacific Northwest, we might think of light-flecked water, sun-dappled forests and dry days at long last. There are hints of this in the light-infused, dreamlike visions from the artists in Winston Wächter’s current show. But there’s also a feverish focus on exuberant color, artifice-laden compositions and perceptual plays that slip back and forth across the thresholds between reality and fantasy, nature and culture.

Artist and writer Amanda Manitch, who recently had a solo show at Winston Wächter, curated this smart, eye-popping exhibition, choosing one art-design group and three artists whose pieces clearly play well with each other while skipping off in their own directions.

Seattle-based Jennifer Zwick’s large, vibrant photographs set the stage for how we construct and experience visual pleasure. A multidisciplinary artist, Zwick carefully creates scenes infused with color and pattern that invite us to look and look again and then think about what and how we’re seeing. In her series titled “Exercise in Formal Composition,” Zwick forms triangles out of rich dark soil and abundant flowers, playing with the notions of positive/negative space and figure/ground relationships. I love that she makes right triangles, common in design templates and construction tools, which generate both balance and dynamism. But of course what really matters are the tensions she creates between logic and sensation and between formal simplicity and optical/conceptual complexity.

Portland-based Peter Gronquist also sucks us into absorbing visual experiences. While Gronquist works in a variety of media, he is represented here by two of his large kaleidoscopic mirror pieces. “Peonies” and “Ferns” are embedded with artificial flora that is reflected again and again, receding into a dark space that isn’t really there. Yayoi Kusama’s “Infinity Mirrors” — on view last summer at the Seattle Art Museum — are an obvious reference, with the immersive, endlessly refracted imagery. But there’s an edgy elusiveness to Gronquist’s work that sets it apart. In fact, the pieces are set apart, decisively framed on the wall, edged by light and lines, creating portal-like spaces that don’t really lead anywhere or take us out of the actuality of looking. We’re aware of what’s inside and outside of the frame; we take in, but can’t quite grasp, the almost hallucinatory geometry and the telescopic wonder of it all.

Neon Saltwater is both the artistic name adopted by Seattle-based artist and interior designer Abby Dougherty and the name of the ethereal, neon-infused world she creates. Her digital renderings of arcades, spas and beachy motels are completely engrossing with their almost-real textures, slick lines and myriad reflections of lights. These cool, gorgeous, lonely spaces conjure up associations with both the futuristic perfection of virtual worlds and vaguely seedy memories of glamorous vacations and escapist activities. Neon Saltwater has extended elements of these images into the real space of the gallery with architectural décor panels — complete with plastic safety bars — and a party table laden with brightly colored, sweetly scented drinks and treats. It’s not that she crosses lines between artifice and reality, desire and detachment; she erases them.

The Seattle-based collaborative group Electric Coffin presents a boisterous conglomeration of 2-D and 3-D work with repeating symbols and slogans related to travel, culture-nature fusions and an almost manic sense of fun, longing and loss. It’s like stumbling across a kitschy-hip, roadside convenience store with a fantastic inventory of souvenirs. A short list of their materials includes paint, wood, stone, plastic, encaustic, acrylic (lots of acrylic), glass, various metals and, last but certainly not least: brightly colored flocking, which they apply generously to towering trophies and striking animal sculptures. The tigers, wolves and bears that appear again and again in different media embody the mysterious power and beauty of the wild. But they also serve as beasts of burden; strapped to their backs are bulky space shuttles, slogan-incised pagodas and blocky delivery trucks — emblems of exploration, yes, but also expansion, appropriation and consumerism. Electric Coffin’s stacked signs, hand-painted in bubble-gum colors, echo this irony with their glossy, iterated messages: “Stay Wild,” “Lost Utopias,” “Middle of Nowhere.”

As we settle into summer, maybe heading off on a road trip or out into nature, we might dream of idyllic moments of suspended time, total escape or satisfying wholeness. The artists of “Summer Dreams” construct enticing, delightful, wistful glimpses of what is both possible and impossible.

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