

# art ltd.

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Los Angeles

“Unbound”

at Edward Cella Art+ Architecture

When we’ve squeezed every metaphor/rationale from abstract painting, it returns like a virile shrub through concrete. Maybe it never leaves. Abstract painting is featured prominently in “Unbound,” the opening group show at Edward Cella Art+ Architecture, newly in Culver City. A sub-theme might also be dealer Cella revising his mission: fewer artists, who have proven their chops, who are yet on an evolving arc. Who can argue with articulating support and innovation?

“Unbound” refers to size, which the artists were given new license to explore while deploying “new materials” in response to this sumptuous space. The title may be a mis-nomer: all of the artists have worked in large scale, but some have enjoyed prior note at more intimate sizes and different aesthetic paradigms. Donnie Molls is a fine realist, whose oil rigs and tires stun with skill, but here the focus pulls back, loosening verisimilitude to depict a dreamy, birds-eye view recalling digital aerial maps and reminding us the distance we suffer from anything real today.

Joshua Aster's intricate close-in shapes extrapolated from nature (lattices of thorns, or here, a vortex of cracking clay) gain presence and precision at near architectural scale. Conceptual artist Jeffrey Vallance is a long way from Tonga here, with in intriguing white plane expertly foreshortened by sheer skilled edging—the guy can actually paint.

There is a postmodern critique here of abstraction's old role as theosophical blowback to 1900's idealism-through-art. This critique comes via the show's stated emphasis on innovative materials over heady narrative. Fair enough. Chris Trueman's gorgeous surfaces glide over Yupo paper, made from recyclable, treeless polyurethane; Mara De Luca adds fabric and precious frames to her image of some glowing, deep-space orb. But, media notwithstanding, the works still conjure that rather satisfying, modernist sublime. Spencer Lewis mounts large frothy gestures away from the wall so we can see the verso realistic image, but this seems a less than provocative way to update Ab Ex. Veteran Ruth Pastine excels here; and Kendell Carter's writing reminds us all communication is eventually abstract.

Historian Paul Wood notes abstraction seduces us, returns us cyclically as Post-Painterly Abstraction, Post-Internet Abstraction, Phenomenology, Optical Art, etc., because it offers comforting references—however remote—to things we all agree to know. But unlike figuration, it leaves enough room for each of our quite subjective/emotive responses—delight, boredom, epiphany, whatever. The works here are both old school and new school; they suggest 'unbound' abstraction is indeed here to stay.

-Marlena Doktorczyk-Donohue