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ART IN REVIEW: Barbara Takenaga at Graham Gallery

by Ken Johnson

Barbara Takenaga's compact, densely patterned paintings are optically riveting and transcendently suggestive. Working on wood panels with small brushes, she creates fields of extremely fine spirals and dots that tend to concentrate and become more luminous toward the center.

Scores of little feathery spoked wheels accumulate in loosely concentric circles, and brightly colored dots like bubbles or cells fill the dark spaces between.

There is a swarming, spacey feeling as though one were traveling at the speed of light through some distant galaxy or into the depths of some inner psychic center of illumination. In the delicate touch and extreme industry of Ms. Takenaga's work you feel this artist's own playfully devotional state of mind; one imagines it's like that of a mystically inspired medieval manuscript illuminator.

On paper Ms. Takenaga produces more expansive, less concentrated compositions consisting mostly of spherical shapes like balls of string outlined in ink and colored pale orange, pink and yellow. At best, as in a big circular field of hundreds of such balls, there is an appealing, slightly wacky but illustrative whimsy like you might find in an inventive children's book. It's in the panel paintings that her trippy enterprise is most persuasively realized.

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