

The Sun

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Barbara Takenaga at McKenzie Fine Art

by David Cohen

The nutty, trippy, transcendently labor intensive aspect of Mr. Siena's work places him in the company of a broad spectrum of contemporary artists whose art taps a finely wrought psychedelia. Peers in this realm would certainly include Bruce Pearson and Fred Tomaselli. The Whitney Museum's recent "Remote Viewing" exhibition of painters of invented worlds, and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's survey of art that explores the narcotic, "Ecstasy: In and About Altered States" point to a spaced-out strand in the zeitgeist.

Barbara Takenaga is a priestess in this cult. She creates sumptuous decorations of mind boggling complexity that fill you with a sense of awe not just because of the exhilarating cosmos they depict but because of a sense of the heightened consciousness required for such creation. Once the eye adjusts to a sense of gaudy overload, and overcomes the prejudice of feeling you might have seen such imagery on the cover of a molecular chemistry textbook, it becomes clear that she is an image crafter of formidable power.

Each of the fourteen paintings on display, which range from 12 by 10 inches to 70 x 60, a significant jump in size for this artist, must have required staggering feats of patience and mental organization. "Rubazu" and "Corona #2 (Golden)", both of 2005, are spirals packed with vibrant balls of radically disjunctive scale. At the heart of each vortex are tiny little dots that such the eye into infinite space.

She favors a much tighter, neater delivery than we get in Mr. Siena, with a bright, dense all-overness and dazzling synthetic color. As a result, we don't get the sense, as we do in Mr. Siena, of a hand leading directly to mental presence. But for an art that seems at first to be all about special effects there is a surprising amount of surface pleasure to be had in Ms. Takenaga. This comes out especially in a play of solid against aqueous paint, which corresponds with a theme of flatness versus depth, as in "Gold + Red" 2005, where the orbs, distributed in an almost Paisley-like spiral, each have a sense of being a contained world, filled with wobbly light.