



Catharine Clark Gallery

In works like "Mayday," Kara Maria puts animals in a calm and still space surrounded by a frenzied environment.

Originals to experience

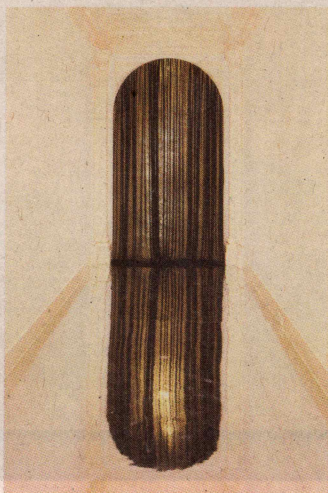
Impact of Jim Hodges, Kara Maria shows impossible to reproduce

By Charles Desmarais

I have a friend — a well-known artist and critic for whom I have great respect — who says that all people make judgments about paintings based on what they see in reproduction. I do not, and I am quite convinced others shouldn't, either.

Reproductions can be useful tools. They remind us of works we have seen in person; they hint at what is in store.

Considered in the light of works we know from direct engagement, they can suggest themes and patterns in an overall body of work. But trying to understand or appreciate art — particularly painting, which relies so heavily upon texture, color and scale — by looking at its photographic likeness is like tasting food from a TV screen.



Anthony Meier Fine Arts

"This Side of Tomorrow" is in Jim Hodges' new show.

Kara Maria's exhibition "Post-Nature" at Catharine Clark Gallery (through March 17) and Jim Hodges' "Silence Stillness" at Anthony Meier Fine Arts (through March 23) have little in common but their utter irreproducibility in print or pixels. You need to get yourself in front of the actual works.

Both artists do have old-fashioned painterly skills. Maria employs hers with what at first appears to be wild abandon, applying brilliant color using a range of abstract strategies. Upon more careful consideration, however, it's clear that what looks untamed is precisely planned.

On a single canvas, she might combine daubs and smears, aerosol bursts, and broad, featureless swaths of paint contained within precise hard edges.

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The real thing: seeing the originals

Originals from page E1

Forms loop, streak and explode across the picture plane, giving here an impression of flat design, there the illusion of storyland dimensionality.

The visual metaphor of feral versus restrained is suited to the subject of her exhibition. That theme dawns upon us as we pick through the abstract tangle to discover minutely detailed portraits of animal representatives of endangered species. Some are very shy, like the wolf lost in a work on paper called "Moondance." But even the big-eyed primate (a lemur?) staring out from the center of "Mayday" is lost at first amid the painter's frenetic sensual assault. It is telling that the animals, in every case, occupy the calm and still moments in a frenzied, decidedly unnatural environment.

In other works, we see specific evidence of modern encroachment on nature. A submarine lurks in the depths of a whale shark's expressionistic habitat in "Into the Blue," an assault weapon emerges from a swipe of color in "Trump's Bee."

We leave the exhibition with the sense of an artist casting about, seeking to find an outlet for righteous anger, a use for prodigious technical skills. Its energy is seductive, the earnestness of its sympathy admirable, but it's about as nuanced as an email typed all in caps.

Jim Hodges takes the opposite tack in a small show that hints at the artist's narrow but profoundly deep range of strategic subtlety.

Hodges, at 60, has made a long career of blurring edges one might not think would exist. Between simple moves and complex ideas. Women's work and men's. Craft and art.

Art and beauty.

"Silence Stillness" is composed entirely of new pieces in a variety of media. They are presented in an arrangement that can only be called heavenly.

Open the gallery door and you step on a highly reflective silver floor; a pleasantly disorienting experience that feels a bit like floating.

Kara Maria: "Post-Nature": 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Tuesdays-Fridays; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays. Through March 17. Free. Catharine Clark Gallery, 248 Utah St., S.F. (415) 399-1439. <https://cclarkgallery.com>

Jim Hodges: "Silence Stillness": 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesdays-Fridays. Through March 23. Free. Anthony Meier Fine Arts, 1969 California St., S.F. (415) 351-1400. www.anthonymeierfinearts.com

The tactic is not unique — one can imagine its source as glamorous old movies or in-the-day visits to discotheques. But it does set you into a space where down is up — and up is up, as well.

In the larger of two rooms, two 10-foot-high canvases, "Moments of Forever" (I and II), are gloriously decked out in accretions of gold and silver glitter over faint clouds of pastel color. Set on the floor, on slightly raised platforms, is a small series of rough clay sculptures that are no more than remnants of the artist's handling. We read the title, "Notes (from a song of longing)," and the space between those words and the 13 empty vessels at our feet fills with melancholy.

At one end of the smaller room, sheer black chiffon drapery fills a doorway. Behind it is a gold-leafed canvas. Its surface, viewed through the curtain, suggests thick organic growth. It is a proscenium and an entry. Both its form and its title, "This Side of Tomorrow," put me in mind of the late Felix Gonzalez-Torres, a friend of Hodges' and another gay artist who dealt with loss and longing.

Eight canvases of varying size, images of flowers painted in oils, compose a single work, "Lingering." They might be fragments of a larger piece, we think, but they don't seem to align. Perhaps they depict varying times, moving from dark to brilliant day.

It is likely that the work has personal meaning for the artist. We could ask him. But the reaction to the work would then become more his emotion, and less ours.

Charles Desmarais is The San Francisco Chronicle's art critic. Email: cdesmarais@sfgchronicle.com Twitter: @Artguy1



Catharine Clark Gallery

In Kara Maria's "Trump's Bee," we see an assault weapon emerging from a swipe of color.



Anthony Meier Fine Arts

"Moments of Forever II" is one of two such 10-foot-high works by Jim Hodges included in the new exhibition.