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Ricky Allman, *This is a Lighthouse*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 101" x 153"

Review: July 16, 2012 By Sharon Mizota

Ricky Allman upends nature of things at Marine Contemporary

Ricky Allman's paintings at Marine Contemporary look like mash-ups of many things we've seen before. Blending abstraction with modernist architectural drawing and references to landscape traditions, they possess the swooping, maelstrom-like qualities of a Julie Mehretu painting, the quirky textures of a collage by Leslie Shows, and the surreal angularity of a De Chirico. Fortunately, they are also absorbing fantasies in their own right, visions of civilization run amok that are both horrifying and ecstatic.

In the larger works, accretions of modernist boxes grow like mutant crystals, beams of multi-colored scaffolding shoot across the sky, and networks of columns jostle for space with craggy mountain ranges. A selection of small, square canvases feel like close-ups from these larger works: little geometric koans, corralling goopy streams of paint into hard-edged facets.

The tension between the ebb and flow of nature and the ordering impulses of civilization is palpable, but not entirely stark. In fact, in Allman's universe, mountain peaks might be sorted and shelved into any number of cubbies, but rectangles propagate like rabbits. Whether these scenarios represent human society annihilating nature or learning to operate by its rules depends upon your point of view. It's probably a little bit of both, but what's most striking is an underlying, anarchic sense of growth.





Ricky Allman, *This is a Lighthouse*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 101" x 153"



Ricky Allman, *Over Turn*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 34"

Review: August 2012

At one point in this exhibition's development, its working title was "Satiated/Proliferate" and although in the end viewers benefit from the more personal, psychological narrative which "I'll Capitate if You Succumb" offers, that other one might have worked just as well. That's because the largest of these smart, cinematic, paradoxical paintings by Kansas City-based Ricky Allman seem to depict a mechanized manufacturing process in which Nature is seen as a series of mass-produced objects. For example in the mesmerizing, inky, and maze-like *Pitch*, trees, snow, bits of rainbow, and what might occasionally be a flower occupy nooks along a suite of vertical conveyor belts in a shadowy, slick, and geographically remote assembly-line. Devoid of human figures that might provide clues as to whether Nature is being made or destroyed in the scene, this absence of humanity's traces becomes its own clue. In the end it reads not like a junkery, but instead more like a factory; the factory floor of the universe, humming along within a closed system in a realm of pure ideas where people are not required or even welcome.

The catalog essay calls it "Darwinian architecture" and that sounds right. Maybe the building has a consciousness that drives it, something internal, that might explain the obscured source of the soft, radiating, insistent light.

In fact, architectural structures and routinely confounded relationships to the natural world and the laws that govern it (like gravity and centrifugal force) are hallmarks of

Allman's painting practice. In the past, the sprawling, rigidly symmetrical, post-industrial structures he favored were specifically representative of the tabernacles and temples of Mormonism, in which he was raised, and, for a while, in which he placed his faith. The lavish interpretations of the natural world and its elements which surrounded and invaded these sanctums were often rendered in artificial palettes that clued the viewer into their symbolist status. But he's "worked out" his Mormon "issues" now, and he's on to broader ideas about painting itself, culture in general, and a more literal examination of the tension between the natural world and the world of ideas (like religion, capitalism, and progress). In that context, the settled-upon show title has a wonderful narrative insightfulness.

