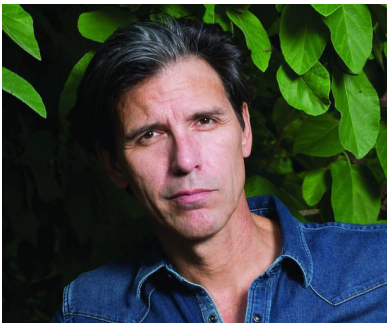


ARTS & BOOKS

EUROPEAN THINKERS AND SOCAL BOOK REVIEW, F6



NOVELIST FASCINATED BY BORDER CROSSINGS BOOK REVIEW, F8



ON VIEW



Photographs by MARTEN ELDER Night Gallery

LAURA LANCASTER'S works, like mystical Rorschach tests, including this "Untitled" one, are being exhibited at the Night Gallery.

Magic in what you see

By Sharon Mizota

If you've ever wielded a paintbrush in the service of art, you'll appreciate the fluidity and deftness of Laura Lancaster's brushwork. The British artist, in her first L.A. solo exhibition at Night Gallery, makes big, lush paintings that teeter between figuration and abstraction.

Her subjects are classic — women, paired with mirrors or water — but the results feel more like Abstract Expressionism, or perhaps a more extreme form of Impressionism. Whichever "ism" you prefer, the works are moving meditations on the vicissitudes of vision, memory and time.

The works begin as photographs, from which Lancaster makes pastel drawings. The final paintings are created from the pastels, representing two stages of abstraction. If a photo is a snapshot of a moment, these paintings are like an echo: a memory faintly recalled.

"Ghost" is a grayscale painting that at first looks wholly abstract, but eventually it resolves into the barest suggestion of a ponytailed woman, seated before a milky vanity. Searching for this figure amid Lancaster's broad, confident brushstrokes is something like a Rorschach test. The gradual revelation feels magical.

The figures in "Untitled" are slightly more distinct: two pale-skinned bodies floating in the water. Their contours are nothing but broad smears of paint, but somehow Lancaster manages to coax a sense of presence and specificity from the tangle.

"Nowhere" is even more impressive. Amid looping, drippy strokes of pale blue, ochre, orange and white over a dark ground, we're surprised by the barest suggestion of a black face emerging from the tumult. It's marvelous how Lancaster creates such a startling presence — once seen, you can't unsee it — with such economy of means.

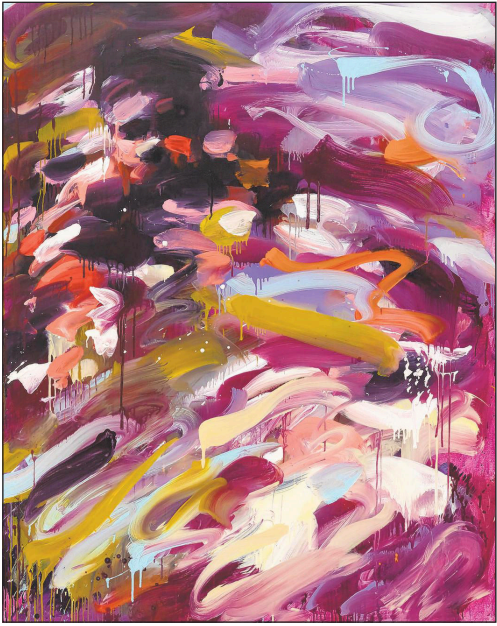
I was reminded of Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell, whose loose, energetic brushwork conjured rapturous landscapes. L.A. artist Mary Weatherford also comes to mind, attuned as she is to the poetics of place. Lancaster applies this atmospheric approach to the figure, an effort that might also be compared to the awkward ballerinas of Edgar Degas: body parts emerging from a flurry of tutus.

The experience of searching, and the pleasure of finding, are delicious. The work evokes memory: the way a thought or image is recalled from the stream of experience, to crystallize, if only for a moment.

Night Gallery, 2276 E. 16th St., L.A. Tuesdays-Saturdays, through May 25. (323) 589-1135, nightgallery.ca



"GHOST" appears purely abstract at first, but keep looking to see what reveals itself.



CAN YOU SEE the face in "Nowhere"?



A WOMAN allures in another "Untitled."

CALIFORNIA SOUNDS

Rich, delicate aural textures

By Randall Roberts

Shannon Lay

"Something on Your Mind" (Sub Pop)

That so few people have heard singer-songwriter Karen Dalton's sublime 1971 folk-rock album "In My Own Time" is a shame (but can be rectified). Luckily, Los Angeles musician Lay is helping spread the gospel with a new rendition of the album's first song.

A mournful work about courage, regret and time, Lay's version offers more delicacy than Dalton's cigarette-scratched original. Dalton, who wrestled with addiction and alcoholism until her death in 1993, wasn't a great advocate for herself, but she's a crucial voice.

Rolling through a finger-picked acoustic opening, Lay unfurls the first notes as though spreading a blanket on grass, then stacks her voice in layers as she sets a tone: "Yesterday, any way you made it was just fine / So you turned your days into nighttime," she sings before moving into the refrain: "Didn't you know, you can't make it without ever even trying?"

The release is the first from a just-announced union between Lay, also a member of the post-punk band Feels, and the famed Seattle label Sub Pop. No word on a Sub Pop album, but Lay is busy this summer. She's signed on as a member of kindred spirit Ty Segall's Freedom Band for a series of shows in New York and Los Angeles.

Sarah Davachi

"Perfumes III" (West 25th/Superior Viaduct)

The debut song from the Mills College-trained multi-instrumentalist's rich, beatless new album, "Pale Bloom," finds her more focused on her primary instrument, piano, after a series of works that were heavy on organs and analog synths. That's not to say that she's abandoned anything; across the four long tracks on the record, she blends and weaves hammer strikes and breathy pipe organ notes.

An experimentalist more interested in exploring calmness than chaos, the Los Angeles-based Davachi on "Perfumes III" wanders a realm connecting contemplative jazz, Erik Satie-esque meditation and Brian Eno-inspired ambient music. She weaves in reverse-tracked textures on "Perfumes I," and on "Perfumes II" manipulates a melancholy voice until it drones with a Scott Walker-suggestive longing.



DENESE SEGALL

SHANNON LAY covers a tune by Karen Dalton.