

Golden Myopia

Two artists tackle paint and ideas at Jacobs Gallery

Juergen Eckstein and Vince Carl join forces for a dual exhibit at Jacobs Gallery through March 10. The show's title, "Luminous Layers," is catchy art-speak for paint applied thickly and in layers — which is a given for most paintings. What is "luminous" about these two men's paintings are their mutual love of gold; be it gold leaf (employed in small squares by Carl) or lustrous gold paint (used for effect by Eckstein). The result is a mixed bag of mind-engaging abstraction and tensely composed figurative modernism.

Oregon coast resident Eckstein likes to add verbiage to his deeply subconscious oil paintings. For example, his *Farmer Hoping for Rain* is arbitrarily titled — maybe it's what popped into his head when he went to title it — and yet it is simply a lush layering of glazed oils (reds, greens, golds) in a

repeated, overlapping globule motif. Of particular interest are the strange patterns monotyped directly into his paint, giving the colors subtle texturing.

Perhaps the most readily accessible of his work is *Passages*, a multiple panel piece evoking arched entryways offering a glimpse — literally — into Eckstein's abstract mind. I say "literally" because his signature is painstakingly integrated into the composition. Thus, we are entering passages that have been physically created by the artist. The "idea" is duly noted ("Oh how clever! It's a metaphor for the window of the frame!"), then forgotten. What stays behind is the way the blue cobalt sinks in behind the gold; the antique effect created by the monotype patterns; the visual connection with the Italian Gothic style associated with polyptych altarpieces of the fourteenth cen-

tury. It becomes a secular altarpiece, more fitting in the altar of art than in church.

But when Eckstein's artist statement reads "technique, style, medium, material ... is rather unimportant," then we are left with works of art striking in their composition yet flimsy in their ideas.

Vince Carl's work, on the other hand, is all about the visual. He seems to walk a thin line between representative figure paintings and purely abstract modernism. But it's one that he can easily cross again and again until the image is set. Of course there's not much surprise walking from one of his paintings to the next; they all feature the same cropped nudes (mostly women) in harsh whites, thickly applied acrylic smears of complementary colors and his signature gold leaf squares.

Carl's strongest pieces originate in the quick figurative sketching on the prepped canvas, where his model has posed in a tense position, full of potential energy. One such image is *Crowded House*, which shows a woman crouching with hands turned inward. Gold-leaf squares push in on the left and a vanishing point squeezes in from the right, thus boxing the figure in a pose of inward implosion.



Crowded House by Vince Carl

The same goes for *Interview*, only this time the figure sits with her back to us, her legs crossed and her hand clenching her seat. The scrapings of blood red acrylic in front of the figure conveys the horror inherent in "sitting for an interview." Carl's textured frottage technique lends itself well to the blank figure, adding real muscular vitality underneath otherwise pasty white skin.

I nearly forgot what's truly striking about these figures, which was helpfully brought to my attention when I overheard an eight-year-old girl and her mother noisily discussing Carl's work.

"That's disgusting!" said the girl, in reference to the nudes, repeating it six times.

"They do look rather white," responded the mother. "They need to get out in the sun more."

EW

"Luminous Layers" by Juergen Eckstein and Vince Carl, on display now through March 10 at the Jacobs Gallery in the Hult Center.



Passages by Juergen Eckstein

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