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AROUND THE GALLERIES

Modern experience, dissected 11 ways

■ Doug Aitken grapples with tough questions at Regen Projects. And more.

By Christopher Knight, Times Staff Writer, Times Staff Writer

Possibilities at play in fields of color

Joe Novak is an unabashed Color Field painter. His paintings and aquatints at Bert Green Fine Arts — the Santa Fe artist's third show there — feature works that will call to mind abstractions as diverse as those by Helen Frankenthaler, Mark Rothko and Morris Louis and the landscape abstractions of Joe Goode.

The show surveys a dozen canvases from the last 18 years. The most dynamic is "Libica" (1997), which can be described in two ways. It's either a burst of shimmering golden atmosphere from within a dark amorphous plane or a dark cloud encroaching from the edges to swallow up a field of shifting light. Novak's best works revel in this sort of ambiguity, in which allusions to creation and destruction balance on a knife edge.

The paintings are made by diluting acrylic paint and applying it to a wet surface, then manipulating the canvas or the paint using a relatively dry brush. "Libica" — the title suggests an Arabic reference to Lybia — is not an illustration of some celestial phenomenon but instead asserts itself as a vivid chromatic form that has found its shape through a combination of natural accident and human intercession.

This is a difficult feat to pull off, and a few of the paintings feel inert. (The smoke drawings, in which candle-soot creates the tornado- and thundercloud-like images on the paper, seem like old-fashioned Surrealist tropes.) The more uniformly uncanny works are several beautiful aquatints, made with multiple printing plates that somehow merge atmospheric halations of color in a way that makes each hue distinct, transparent and inseparable from the others — all at once.

Bert Green Fine Art, 102 W. 5th St., (213) 624-6212, through Nov. 19. Closed Sundays and Mondays.
www.bgfa.us



'Libica'
(Bert Green Fine Art)

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CALENDAR * PICKS OF THE WEEK

Nov. 18 - 24, 2005

in this week's issue

features

Sock Monkeyman Tony Millionaire in conversation with BILL SMITH.

DOUG HARVEY on 10 Comics That Shook the World, and the big new museum show;

Plus, comic book re-toolings by JIM SHAW

Blame Ovitz: When Art Started Imitating Hollywood.
By NIKKI FINKE

news

JEFFREY ANDERSON on the child molester who got away, only to strike again. It could be a case of Rocky's office politics interfering with justice.

ROBERT GREENE on the mishandling of the sins of politicians by the L.A. Let-It-Slide Commission, known in more forgiving circles as the City Ethics Commission.

ERIC BERKOWITZ maps out the next steps needed to make the Red Line to the sea a reality.

ERIN AUBRY KAPLAN on the refreshing demands of South Gate High School students.

STEVEN MIKULAN on Mr. Greenwald's Wal-Mart war.

BRENDAN BERNHARD scolds Western Civilization for its politeness toward French rioters, among other scum.

PLUS, ROBERT GREENE on Antonio's turbulent flight.

LA WEEKLY BLOGS

Mr. Fish: Catch of the Day

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MUSIC PICKS OF THE WEEK

art HELEN SEIBERT, JOE NOVAK

Helen Seibert's promising art career and high-society life, like Zelda Fitzgerald's (whose own work is on view at Pepperdine), was cut short by mental illness and, unlike Zelda, Seibert was too far gone to make art once she was institutionalized. The loss, to judge from this selection, was profound. Working first in New York and then in Marin County, Seibert explored several directions in abstract painting. As a student (the only student) of Arthur Dove, she produced some very strong (if very Dovish) landscape abstractions, both lyrically flowing and rhythmically cubist. She combined the two modes in landscape and figure paintings that also evince a solid knowledge of surrealism (she and her husband spent the late '30s in Europe). Then, in the 1940s, Seibert went completely non-objective, even entirely geometric in several highly distinctive and very handsome works that prove the most bracing items in this surprising, impressive, quietly tragic survey. Another East Coaster flourishing in the West, Joe Novak is still among us and working in New Mexico and still active, maintaining his late-starting second career as a painter. Novak's luminous, nebulous paintings feature soft blooms of pigment burgeoning across the canvas, filling visual space so thoroughly that they erase all sense of depth. One step beyond Rothko's, Novak's paintings gently force the eye to breathe - color. Helen Seibert at Denenberg, 417 N. San Vicente Blvd., W. Hollywood; Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; thru Nov. 24. (310) 360-9360. Joe Novak at Bert Green, 102 W. Fifth St.; Tues.-Sat., noon-6 p.m.; thru Nov. 19. (213) 624-6212.

—Peter Frank



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