

BARBARA ROGERS at Gebert Contemporary

Barbara Rogers' intricate canvases array flowers and classical motifs in layered landscapes of shadow, color and light. Balance is everything—her forms hover, shapes create constellations, yet each remains isolated, alone. The scenes she depicts are constructed and surreal, traits shared by dreams and sometimes experienced in the fleeting apprehension of the waking world. The random, scurrying detritus of the day pauses for a moment, and in place of chaos or dulling compulsion appear wondrous shapes that swirl and delight.

Rogers began her art career as a realist painter whose work was imbued with a tinge of fantasy. She was successfully known on the West Coast for her romantic tableaux of figures set in garden landscapes, executed in one the California airbrush styles favored several decades ago. Then a typhoon destroyed her world.

While on a visit to Hawaii in the 1980s to do research on tropical gardens, the island of Oahu was hit by hurricane Eiva. The gardens she had traveled to research were decimated. In the aftermath of the storm, Rogers found herself wandering the wreck-strewn beaches and photographing the remains of the hurricane. She took pictures of fragments of plants torn by the wind, amazed that she was still alive. On returning to her studio, Rogers found she had lost interest in airbrush and acrylics and set out to explore the sensual world of oil painting. Also transformed by her experience in the typhoon was the idealized world that had been her home in painting. Horizon, firm ground and knowable depth vanished, taken over by the violent force of the hurricane. She still lives in the storm.

Forces of imbalance and randomness are countered in compositions that still hint at the naturalist concerns of landscape traditions, but owe much to the formal exercises of non-objective painting. Though Rogers uses recognizable forms such as flowers, bits of architecture and Baroque decorative elements, she



Above: Barbara Rogers, *Arriving at Lake Palace*, 2010, 60" x 52", oil on canvas. Photo: Gebert Contemporary

Right: Barbara Rogers, *Ancient Embellishments*, 2010, oil on canvas, and replicated as a mural, dimensions vary. Photo: Gebert Contemporary



arranges these figures over ground in play that is purely formal. Unlike some abstract works, her painting is not flat or merely graphic. She still pulls from her training in realism: she employs perspectives that create illusions of dimension, depth and distance. Roger's landscapes, however, exist outside naïve realism. Their depths are multiple, backgrounds are layered far over near, the perspectives are multiple and often unique to each figure within the scene. If this is realism, it is cosmic. It is as if we are looking into many separate worlds simultaneously, their coexistence known only to the viewer. ■

Barbara Rogers *Samsara*

On view through mid March

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