

LOS ANGELES TIMES

February 29, 2008

By Holly Myers, Special to The Times



Megan Williams received her bachelor of fine arts from CalArts in 1978, **Jessica Minckley** from Otis in 2005. Their parallel solo shows at the Carl Berg Gallery -- Williams' 17th, Minckley's first -- make for an illuminating glimpse across generations, each accomplished in its way but driven by fundamentally different concerns.

Williams was among the 16 artists included in MOCA's historic 1992 "Helter Skelter" exhibition, and her work continues to exude the irreverent vitality that defined that group. Her signature style is unmistakable: cartoonish forms -- mostly human figures and anthropomorphized buildings in this selection of pieces -- characterized

by a rubbery agility, giddy pictorial buoyancy and an often furious sense of internally generated motion.

The predominant dynamic throughout the show is the tension between immobility and propulsion, claustrophobic containment and ecstatic release, reflected especially in the jaunty motif of the skyscraper. In a midsize painting called "Untitled (Building Escaping)," one such skyscraper wrenches free from the architectural tangle of its surroundings and flees on human legs. In another, titled simply "Rage," a similar building whirls into a cyclone of wrath, hurling a fist toward the viewer while spewing its contents -- pieces of furniture, rolls of toilet paper, alarm clocks -- in every direction.

Most of these paintings involve relatively centralized compositions whose pictorial activity looks to be held together by centripetal force. In the largest and most exhilarating work, however -- a wall-sized installation of five small canvases revolving around a figure who seems part-woman, part-tree and part-slingshot -- this force falls away and the forms seem to explode beyond the bounds of the central canvas, the imagery skimming from canvas to wall to canvas and beyond.



Minckley has a much lighter approach: Her exhibition is quiet, delicate and contemplative. Each piece feels considered and specific in nature, a sequence of discrete conceptual statements rather than a windstorm of broad thematic strokes.

But for her consistently delicate touch, Minckley has no signature style to speak of, nor any overriding affiliation with a particular medium. The show combines drawing and found object sculpture with an ease that's become typical among younger artists (thanks in part to the influence of two other "Helter Skelter" artists, Jim Shaw and Mike Kelley), though Minckley's drawing is particularly skillful.

The most enchanting works are the simplest: a series of pattern-oriented drawings made on the epigraph pages of books; a ceiling-high stack of pink cake boxes; a Mormon Ad (a poster distributed by the Mormon Church) coated with a thick crust of salt. Concise yet enigmatic, each has the air of a meditative exercise.

Notably absent is anything approximating Williams' fierce sense of propulsion -- which is to say, the spirit of rebellion that "Helter Skelter" so brilliantly encapsulated. But what, one might ask, is there for an artist of Minckley's generation to propel away from? The market is booming; L.A. has become a widely respected art capital; galleries are sweeping up artists right out of school; political tensions are high, but without the degree of mobilization that prevailed in the late 1970s; and no particular stylistic or ideological hegemony predominates.

A young artist today comes to distinction by different, perhaps subtler means. There is much to be gained from both approaches.

Carl Berg Gallery, 6018 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 931-6060, through March 8. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

www.carlberggallery.com.