

Dellamarie Parrilli's Tribute to an Adopted City

There has never been a shortage of topnotch contemporary women painters in Los Angeles: Jay DeFeo, Joan Brown, and Deborah Remington come most immediately to mind. But many others emerged from or migrated to that sprawling, sun-splashed city where palm trees alternate with stop lights, and there has always been a lively art scene.

Recently, when Dellamarie Parrilli decided to leave Chicago, where she was born and made her initial reputation, to join their distinguished company, she created a series of untitled works inspired by L.A.

Executed in acrylic on canvas, polycarbon on acrylic cubes, and the unusual medium of watercolor on canvas, these works are among her most exuberant and accomplished to date. The latter paintings in watercolor a good place to start. These compositions are much larger in scale than most works in the medium, since watercolor paper 72 by 60 inches is difficult to find (unless, like Charles Burchfield, one wishes to paste several smaller sheets of handmade Arches together — a process that creates seams, which would interrupt the flow of Parrilli's massive abstract forms).

Beyond all technical and practical considerations, however, these works possess a unique luminosity, abetted by a combination of majestic scale, chromatic subtlety and tonal delicacy that eludes even "poured paint" Color Field painters like Helen Frankenthaler, Paul Jenkins, and Morris Louis. Among them, the composition that appears to allude most specifically to the qualities of Los Angeles that attracted Parrilli to relocate there is a very large untitled watercolor and acrylic on canvas with a fiery red orb dominating the center of its composition, flanked by semitranslucent sinuously graceful green shapes suggesting floating floral forms.

Although Parrilli considers herself a direct descendent of the Abstract Expressionists, as well as of Kandinsky and other pioneers of nonobjective painting, and rarely allows recognizable subject matter to invade her formal lexicon, this composition evokes a sense of tropical heat and organic growth, with its hot red and orange emanations of light-filled hues, and its clumps of white speckles suggesting tiny white flowers, all seeming to emanate from the solar mass at its center.

Other large watercolors on canvas in the same series employ a dynamic "wet into wet" technique to send liquidic areas of blue and



Watercolor and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches

purple hues rippling out from large circular and semicircular shapes in a manner that creates the illusion that the pools of diluted aquarelle are still in active motion. Indeed the entire series is characterized by a sense of flux, of the graceful movement of filmy veils of color dancing on the picture plane, its two-dimensional flatness opened up and imbued with a sense of depth by Parrilli's multilayered approach to washes of vibrant color.

By contrast her works in polycarbon on acrylic — and particularly on three dimensional acrylic cubes — enable her to work in literal depth, merging painting and sculpture in her own unique manner. As opposed to the airy amorphousness of her compositions in watercolor on canvas — which give the impression of having been created with a brush dipped in liquid light — here Parrilli solidifies her forms and brightens her color areas in a manner akin to the harder edges of the designs in a mandala. The opacity of these more definitely defined forms plays off exquisitely against the translucent but "hard" sheen of the acrylic boxes. The effect is as quasi "industrial" as Billy Al Bengston's highly finished emblematic compositions spray-painted in enamel on aluminum, inspired by the Los Angeles Custom Car Culture. Here, too, in a moment of pure inspiration (apparently taking poetic license from Walt Whitman's famous lines: "Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself!"), Parrilli departs from her usual adamantly abstract stance, encasing holographic-looking images of tiny birds, as delicate as those in a classic Chinese

scroll painting, within some of her luminously transparent acrylic cubes.

A more familiar facet of this versatile artist's ever expanding oeuvre — at least to her long-term critical champions and collectors — can be seen in Parrilli's recent acrylic paintings on canvas. These also untitled large-scale compositions, ranging from 72 by 60 inches upwards to 72 by 108 inches, absorb and update the entire coloristic and tactile vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism for the postmodern era on the scale to which it has the most impact. One such work employs muscular juicy pink red, blue, and white strokes broad enough to have been painted with a broom rather than with an ordinary brush. They swerve, swirl and interlock dynamically in thick coloristically variegated areas of heavy impasto with an energy akin to de Kooning.

In another, even larger acrylic on canvas, Parrilli adopts a more linear, calligraphic manner in which the discerning eye can catch glimpses of actual alphabet letters, albeit fluidly distorted beyond easy legibility. These linear shapes are laid down in white pigment against underscrawls of blue ecriture that glow against an overall deep crimson-purple ground, like palimpsests in a gigantic manuscript. In yet another composition, primarily in pale pink and bright blue hues, in the same series, Parrilli combines acrylics and watercolors on canvas, playing off the thick, craggy consistency of the former medium against the loosely flowing and vertically dripping liquidity of the latter one to achieve striking textural contrasts.

Equally engaging tactile qualities of another kind capture one's attention in a large acrylic painting in horizontal format (relatively rare for Parrilli, who works more often on vertical canvases), fully 96 inches wide. A predominantly deep pink ground, densely embellished with red, blue, and yellow spatters, drips and strokes, is overlaid with a buoyant linear dance of thin white that the artists tosses out like lariats.

Here, again, the graceful movement of these linear elements can only be said to resemble a form of terpsichore. And one is reminded that Parrilli was a dancer and a singer, before a life threatening illness aborted her entertainment career — biographical information is only relevant because of the bearing it has on the energy and grace that she brings to her visual art.

Indeed, Dellamarie Parrilli is still very much of a dancer. — Ed McCormack

To see more of Dellamarie Parrilli's works, go to www.parrilli.com