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REVIEW

JACKIE TILESTON: *PHENOMORAMA*



Nirvanopolis by Jackie Tileston

Phenomorama, the current exhibit running through Oct. 11 at the Holly Johnson Gallery, highlights Jackie Tileston's most recent mixed-media paintings and gouache on paper. With this rapidly evolving artist, newest means her most complex, interesting and best.

Ms. Tileston creates a world on her canvasses that slowly unfold. From a distance, her work is an abstract landscape or underwater scene. Closer examination exposes a clash of locations interacting or at least coexisting in the same space.

Nirvanopolis suggests an eastern state of paradise set in an urban environment. Rising from a cloud or a wave, a multicolored barrier wall protects a metropolis. Close examination reveals a city of turrets probably from India and Cambodia alongside a New England clock tower. Asian iconography paintings are propped along a wall leading to the city. Craftsmen or vendors sell their wares along a street while others engage in chat. In the distance throngs of people line a wharf and walk over a bridge crossing a river apparently going nowhere in particular. Backing away from the painting, the tiny details of the city again fade behind the dominant feature of the canvas, that brightly hued fortification wall.

An abstract world with mountains of swirling color and an invasion from the sky is what I first saw in No Matter Where (Not Pictured Here). A hand points down, an

outstretched arm reaches into this imaginary world from beyond, and several decapitated bodies walk straight up. Where are the bodies going? Where are the hands from? Ms. Tileston leaves that to the imagination but makes it clear that while she has included many surprises in her work, wherever they're from isn't pictured here.

End of Fiction begins with an atomic explosion of color. Perched on a cloud is a pastoral setting of mountains and trees framed by a sunset. Closer inspection reveals a covered wagon, horses, and cattle getting water from a stream. Was this a scene from history or more likely how we imagine history tainted by Hollywood westerns?

I worked my way slowly across I'll Go If You Go, which appears from across the room on the portions of the canvas that are dazzled with color to be a colorful Jackson Pollack drip painting. But rather than the streams allowed to go wild, they form a nebulous Asian dragon. The painting kept its secrets as I first swept across the five-foot canvas. I looked more closely. Buried halfway across I found a tiny, faded collection of finely crafted pocket watches. Then off to one side were two images from China were dainty porcelain dolls dressed neatly in fashion evoking the era of Mao. Ming vases and lapis animal carvings tell the story of centuries of craftsmanship that equal the quality of those precision timepieces. The counterpoint is a third image at the far right. A collection of cheap, plastic inflatable animals and stacks of boxes of toys, all presumably from China, show where we've progressed.

Ms. Tileston's paintings are done on naturally tan Belgian linen, stretched as firmly as any canvas. However, the fine linen weave gives the paintings a softness and subtlety of texture. The smaller gouaches and mixed media on paper begin with a harsher black-painted background rather than the more neutral ocher. An explosion of color disrupts a pastoral scene in Phenomorama No. 2. A palm tree at fiery sunset is overtaken by a blazing whirlwind in Phenomorama No. 4. Both the smaller gouaches and large linen oils are a joy to survey from first fanciful glance across the gallery to closer scrutiny.

by David Taffet

Holly Johnson Gallery
1411 Dragon Street
Dallas TX 75207
(214) 369-0169
www.hollyjohnsongallery.com

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