

Joan Moment @ LIMN & JAYJAY

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TIDDLYWINKS II, 2009, Acrylic on canvas, 66" x 60"

Her paintings are highly personalized maps of the universe. Forms emerge out of thin, flowing washes — of bright yellow or deep blue — that are applied while the canvas is horizontal and bring to mind riparian flood plains, tidal eddies, lava flows, deserts and other terrestrial forms as seen from a great height. Over these grounds, eschewing brushes almost entirely, she imprints circular forms, both opaque and transparent, from which run stalactite-like smears that fall vertically in conformity with the Earth's gravitational pull. These elements bring to mind stars and planets seen from indeterminate vantage points, ranging from telescope-enhanced views of distant galaxies (and their accompanying gaseous clouds) to cloud-obscured, airborne visions of the Earth through which topographical features can be discerned.

It is through these subtle disorientations that the viewer comes to distrust the ingrained concept of a fixed self located like a pilot somewhere in the front of their heads. Rather, Moment suggests the notion that we exist outside of time and space: that we are at once everywhere and nowhere — like stars and galaxies whose images are history before they even reach us. Her work attempts to register this fleeting, almost incomprehensible reality.

The pictures call forth this phenomenon in an almost endless chain of natural metaphors. The physical operation of the paint, for example, which the artist encourages to puddle and pond into eddies, rivulets and lakes, is enough on its own to evoke this force. It doesn't posture or pretend, it just does what paint does by

Contemporary art tends to ricochet between opposite ends of a conceptual spectrum that spans objective nature and subjective mind. The objective camp is occupied by photo-realists like Richard Estes, formalists like Donald Judd and land-artists like Richard Long who posit the existence of "hard" facts, independent of any perceiving consciousness. The subjective camp harbors artists like Francisco Clemente, Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, all of whom claim the primacy of personal experience and deny the entire material apparatus in which it is embedded.

Painter Joan Moment, who has two overlapping shows of abstract works on view — one at LIMN Gallery in San Francisco, the other at JAYJAY in Sacramento — knowingly sidesteps this illusory divide; she has intuited and internalized the essential unity of consciousness and its objects, realizing in full, the capacity of paint to evoke and embody this unity.

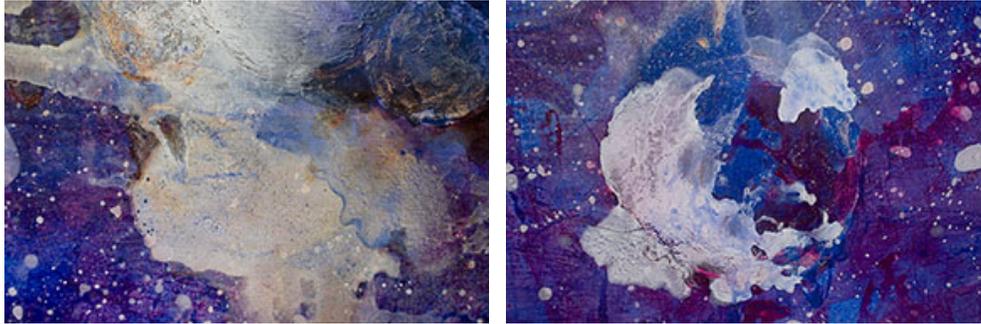
Her paintings



ALCHEMICAL INTERACTIONS, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 96" x 72"

virtue of Moment's ability to marshal its natural inclinations to her own ends. Of course this is only possible because she has learned, through decades of trial and error, how to cultivate an extraordinary visual and spiritual intelligence, how to leave well enough alone, and how to make herself, like the paint, a conduit for the *Chi* of nature. She is an accidental Taoist, which of course is the best type.

For precedents, take a look at the 17th century screen paintings of the Japanese Rimpa masters [Tawaraya Sotatsu](#) and [Ogata Korin](#), and you immediately notice an obsession with combining aerial and eye-level views. Theirs, unlike those seen in Cubism, are not limited to discrete objects, but instead diffuse spatial views through the entire surface.



ALCHEMICAL INTERACTIONS (Details)

They also employ opaque, decorative shapes, often matte-black, above the apparent surface of an image whose textures, patterns, and rhythms parallel the elemental forces of nature. The affinities with Moment are obvious in works of calligraphy from the same period, particularly those by [Hon'ami Koetsu](#). His "Poems and Paintings of Grasses and Flowers of the Four Seasons" is an obvious ancestor of Moment's imprinted leaf paintings from the 1990s. It shares her sense of muted color and refined textures. It also possesses a kind of indefinite spatial structure in which the vertical strands of calligraphy occupy the same function and a similar pictorial space as the discs in Moment's recent pictures. Much Japanese painting from the 13th century on deploys the device of quasi-aerial viewpoints where people and buildings are viewed through gaps in golden cloud forms.



LOOKING THROUGH THE SEA OF BLUE MOONS, Acrylic on canvas, 80" x 60"

The people and buildings are depicted not from above but from eye-level, thus linking conventional and aerial viewpoints in a single picture in a manner that predicts some of Moment's work but has few other descendants in Western art.

The use of collage in Rimpa painting, where fragments float across the surface, is another type of visual precedent for Moment's discs. In a recent work, "Of Polarities, Waves and Half-Moons", she subdivides semi-transparent white discs with broad black bars and half-circles set at differing but coordinated angles to give the whole structure a feeling of movement, like the cogs of some universal machine. This surface device deepens the spatial complexities of the composition, creating a rotational movement completely at odds with that of the planetary systems that lay below.

The resulting disjunction between background and surface has brought into clear focus the unsettling oscillation between aerial and conventional perspectives only hinted at in Moment's constellation paintings prior to 2004. In recent paintings like "Tiddlywinks I" and "Tiddlywinks II", the effect of these discs is to inject new life into old metaphorical partnerships. Moment's work since the '80s has bridged the widest possible

metaphorical chasm linking the most extreme macrocosmic elements (planets, galaxies etc) with the most microscopic elements (cells, molecules etc), as in a 2008 canvas titled "Atoms and Galaxies".



NEBULAR HYPOTHESIS, TK YEAR DIMENSIONS

Such relationships by themselves are not original to Moment's work. We've seen them before in [Ross Bleckner](#) and [Vija Celmins](#). In fact, the affinities between what can be viewed through a telescope and a microscope are readily apparent to casual observers. Sometimes, as with the blue canvases stamped with white circles ("Archipelago", "Disc Cluster", "Double Cluster", "Star Map", "This Can Happen to Anyone", "Luminous Net", "Mapping the Stars") that remind us of bubbles, stars and planets, affinities between all kinds of opposites are evoked. In these paintings the momentariness of the bubble and the geological longevity of stars and galaxies are joint tenants of the same arena.

The effect is like the blinking lights of constellations that reach out to us from deep space. Generally, the quiet revelations of Moment's canvases exist in the unfamiliar passage through what is really the space of the imagination, from micro to macrocosm, from the infinite to the infinitesimal, from the ways in which the cosmos is evoked at a given scale only for it to dissolve at the same space at which both co-exist. Moment treats them as equivalents, as if the blinking of the stars, their simultaneous pulsations through time and space, are ultimately metaphors for the vibrations of consciousness, as if the heavens may ultimately be a palimpsest of the nervous system.



OF POLARIES, WAVES, HALF MOONS, 2009, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60"

Or, as T.S. Eliot so aptly put it in "[Four Quartets](#)": "The dance along the artery/The circulation of the Lymph/Are figured in the drift of stars".

—DAVID OLIVANT

*Joan Moment's "Intermittent Mapping" runs through September 12, 2009 at LIMN Gallery, SF.
"Aerial Illuminations, Moment's show at JAYJAY in Sacramento, runs from September 9 to October 24, 2009.*

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