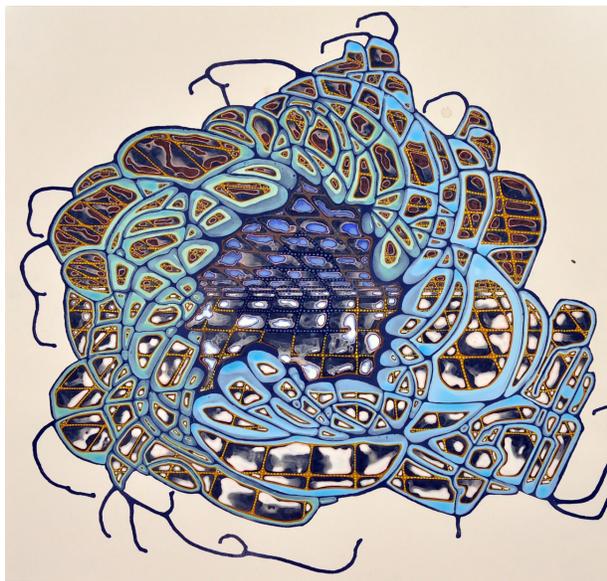


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Sarah Walker, at first glance, appears to be part of a historical lineage of formal, process-oriented abstract painting. She builds her works layer-by-layer, mixing pigments with polymer media so that the strata have the transparency of a watercolor wash. Sometimes her surfaces also have the frosting-like quality of encaustic. But where her most obvious forebears – Brice Marden and Terry Winters – engage in psychological attempts to limn the intangible through symbols and gestures, Walker’s paintings came of age in a world that is faster, busier, and less contemplative. Instead of projecting the world of the subconscious onto canvas, the structures and forms in Walker’s pictures are informed by the contemporary deluge of information, visual and otherwise.

Her “objects of meditation,” as the gallery press release describes them, strive to make sense of these images, facts, and figures by fixing their aggregate as if it were a tissue specimen on a microscope slide. They evoke micro and macro worlds that only recently became visible to us through technological advances, yet they remain fundamentally alien.

Walker’s paint handling reflects this dichotomy. If one layer is organic and loose, kin to the sweeping branch gestures of Marden, the next is a fractured Terry Winters grid, with bold lines angling outward, providing a pictorial armature and the suggestion of traditional perspective. Importantly, the paintings’ subsequent layers never completely obscure what came before, so the viewer can infer each painting’s construction through careful examination of the surface stratification.



“Spiderpool 9”, 2011, acrylic on Fabriano paper, 22 x 23”



“Mount Meru”, 2012, acrylic on panel, 28 x 26”

While a pseudo-scientific reading of Walker’s imagery is tempting, it is by no means exclusive. Her crowded paintings vacillate between interpretations. Unnamed Meteor, for example, might be a cross-section of an infected plant chloroplast or a space-time schism or an exuberant subway tag — or all of these at once. The press release speaks of the paintings’ mutability: They “serve by turns as objects, territories, and screens for projection. Here at this perspectival point, we are invited to contemplate objects as portals to multi-dimensional perception.” In this respect, Walker’s pictures are little different from Winter’s or, for that matter, from Jackson Pollock’s, Mark Rothko’s or Cy Twombly’s. All of these painters recognized beauty as fundamentally irrational and changeable, a fleeting perception of the real rather than a Platonic ideal.

Of the paintings, Mount Meru stands out. The work’s central form – a warped grid whose interstices are filled with biomorphic shapes – is monumental, yet playful, and reminiscent of Carroll Dunham’s cartoon exuberance. The form’s interior and surroundings bubble and buzz with activity that calls to mind scientific illustrations of chemical cocktails or atomic intercourse. The title of the painting nods to the contemplative aspect of Walker’s work alluded to in the press release. In Buddhist, Hindu and Jain cosmologies, Mount Meru is the sacred mountain at the center of the universe –

the heart, if you will, of the meditative enterprise. But Meru is also manifest in a more terrestrial guise, as an active volcano in what is today Tanzania. Dynamic tension, in this case between the metaphysical and the worldly, but also between high and low art influences, and realms of knowledge, is characteristic of Walker's strongest works.

Walker includes six of her densely packed, all-over panel paintings in EYEFINGER, as well as six works on paper which use the same acrylic media and techniques. The configurations in the latter are no less vivid or graphic than those in the paintings. They could be isolated passages from the panel works and, like those, they remain in flux, despite being framed by the edges of the paper. The forms are mineral changelings, alchemical. In Spiderpool 8, a melting, crystalline form projects outward toward the viewer. Then, the shape recedes, transforming into a portal, an opening into some new dimension, before it flattens into two tiers. The most compelling works on paper are Arteries and Spiderpool 3. In the latter work, especially, one sees evidence of the influence of graffiti and microscopy, but the curves of pink and red and the broken, cellular grid seem like nascent characters, suggestive of some new alphabet already finding form in our mind.

What prospects are spelled out? What prophecies are voiced? Walker provides the raw materials, but leaves the prognostication up to us.

—CHRISTOPHER REIGER



"Arteries", 2012, acrylic on Fabriano paper, 58 x 55"