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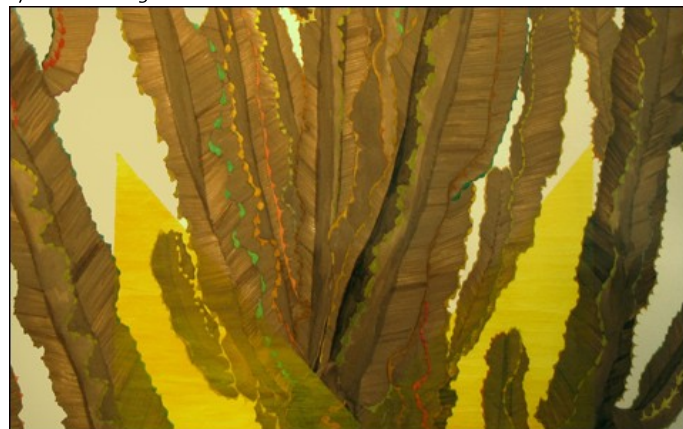
ARTS & CULTURE » VISUAL ART

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Artists' Models at Vessel Gallery

Five artists explore structure in nature and consciousness.

By DeWitt Cheng



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Paul Cezanne's famous advice to painters to seek in nature "the cylinder, the sphere, the cone" may have gradually led to today's concept-based art. However, despite having made Impressionism monumental and classical (and complexly geometric), "like the art of museums," the father of Analytic Cubism always kept nature as his source and touchstone: "When I judge art, I take my painting and put it next to a God-made object like a tree or flower. If it clashes, it is not art." Of course, our concepts of nature, consciousness, and art museums are changing, too.

In Penta, five artists — **Ezra Li Eismont**, **Kevin Haas**, **Amy Nathan**, **Bunnie Reiss**, and **Camille Willis** — examine structures composed of repeated/reflected geometric elements as found in nature and the human mind, that ceaseless synthesizer of objective and subjective, perceptual and conceptual, material and spiritual. Eismont's studies of the occult and mystical led him to Tibetan Buddhist mandalas, "the meeting point of sacred science, art, and philosophy," microcosms representing "the initial point of creation and its subsequent flowering and growth into a myriad of interconnected possibilities." His bifold acrylic-on-cardboard "Meditation" paintings, with their shimmering gold leaf, suggest esoteric game boards.

Haas' digitally altered photographs are also influenced by Tibet, along with his pantheistic feeling for nature; his "kaleidoscopic mandalas" ("Cloud Sphere," "Virginia Mmm," and "Waking Up in Connecticut Graveyard") imbue "rocks, leaves, clouds, spider webs, fruit, trees, and shadows [with] celestial qualities," proffering "a supernatural and psychedelic vision of our world." Nathan sees in "the plant outside my


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door, Mt. Tam, a collected pair of pine cones, [and] a cactus ... touchstones ... infused with ... significance." An immigrant from the Midwest, she sees the quilts made by pioneer women, employing castoff scraps of cloth to commemorate their own lives, as precursors to her reinterpreting nature drawings in assemblage and paint ("Cactus as Tree," "Rotating Flight"), through geometry and abstraction. Reiss, too, is a scavenger, "collecting and arranging, investigating and reconstituting ... new and old ... disregarded splendors" ("Philosopher's Stone Quilt" and "Quilt Pattern" assemblages). Willis investigates our mental geometry in jewelry and sculpture pieces ("Circle," "Square Model," "Pyramid") that suggest, through their proliferations of basic forms, the life cycle: "a seed shape and its potential as a growing or shrinking structure frozen within time and space." Whether worn or walked through, her wireframe structures allow the viewer to "exist from the perspective of different sizes at the same moment," at micro and macro orders of magnitude. Penta runs through August 7 at **Vessel Gallery** (471 25th St., Oakland). 510-893-8800 or Vessel-Gallery.com

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