



# EAST BAY EXPRESS

OAKLAND, BERKELEY, AND EAST BAY NEWS, EVENTS, RESTAURANTS, MUSIC, & ARTS

ARTS & CULTURE » VISUAL ART

SEPTEMBER 15, 2010

Create Account

## Walter James Mansfield's Material World

Sacramento-based artist creates lyrical topographies.

By DeWitt Cheng



A noumenon, according to Kant, is an object that is discernible only to pure reason, but not to the senses or intuition; noumena ostensibly constitute the hidden reality behind the world of phenomena. While post-Kantians may have misgivings about such esoteric entities, making private imaginary universes visible to the public has been the goal of artists for a long time, and that aesthetic urge continues, despite repeated recent proclamations about the death of art. *Noumenon* is the title of a show of paintings by **Walter James Mansfield**, a Sacramento-based artist who clearly fits this artist profile by **Barbara Seabridge**: "someone who has ... the urgent desire to build something meaningful and useful, but [not] a house or chair or anything else that can be named" and "starts building in the vague hope [of making] something correct and meaningful." Mansfield fuses 1950s Abstract Expressionist painterly gesture and 1970s postminimalism to create complex contemporary landscapes and portraits.

Mansfield's "metaphysical landscapes" are arenas for action as **Jackson Pollock**'s huge canvases were, "physical and psychological place[s] or environment[s] in which experiences, actions and events take place and are given context." As Pollock compared himself to nature, Mansfield seeks to work in parallel with "physics, gravity, erosion, deterioration, etc." "Capay Valley" presents an orange-brown view of silhouetted hills and mountains that is overlaid by a bas-relief network of dribbled tan paint suggesting both cracked mud and calligraphy; the eye jumps back and forth between flatness and depth as it does scanning reflective still water. In "Encased Pour," wispy patterns of dark paint have been sanded to form plateau-like stepping-stones lapped by lighter cloudy

forms. In "Translucent Blue with Black Pour," the byplay between the background of light blue swaths and the foreground of black cracks suggests mud puddles reflecting radiant skies.

Other paintings superimpose atop the "natural" organic elements various weblike grids of poured paint reminiscent of fences, window/skylight stanchions/mullions, cartoons, filmstrips, and mapped roads and streets, all gently wavering. "Noumenon," "Salt Point Restructured," "Desert Lattice (29 Palms)," "Intersections of Dusk," and "Filtered Landscape (Orange)" nicely match the container and the contained; only in a couple of works does the grid become overly assertive, cease its dialectic with the "view," and turn into frosting. Mansfield's iconic heads ("Refracted Instance," "Verdant Archetype," and "Forbearer"), emerging from scumbled, worked backgrounds, suggest the same slow dance between improvisation and organization. Jewelry by **Rebecca Deans** is also on view. *Noumenon* runs through September 25 at **Vessel Gallery** (471 25th St., Oakland). 510-893-8800 or Vessel-Gallery.com.

---

*Contact the author of this piece, send a letter to the editor, like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter.*

---

« **Slave Slop**

**Fowl Play at Impact Theatre** »

---

## Related Locations

 Vessel Gallery

471 25th St. **OAKLAND-DOWNTOWN**

510-893-8800

Vessel-Gallery.com

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Be the first to review this location!