

Erik Parra

erik@erikparra.com

608-239-1456

Cosmos Deep

Review

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Bryson Gill's painting, **Cosmo (Backdrop)** does that thing that great paintings do, it calls you forth, pushes you back and then calls you in again. Like a dear friend it's hard to let Cosmo go. Gill combines oil paintings, works on paper and sculpture for his solo exhibition *The Friends and Neighbors Effect*, at Triple Base in San Francisco. Throughout the exhibit repeated forms, image fragments and moments of artistic strategy slowly reveal themselves and the echo of these moments creates a feeling of immediate intimacy, compelling us to get lost in the visually rich world created by Gill. This particular combination of different mediums is a risk with a solid payoff despite a nagging feeling that the drawings and sculpture seem less developed. The real gems, however, are the paintings.

The seven modestly sized oil paintings that Gill presents are comprised of two main motifs, what I am calling the backdrops and the icons. The icon paintings contain central dominant objects that appear to be from non-Western culture, painted in the vernacular of the still life then obscured by simple painted geometric shapes. The overt collage feeling that these paintings evoke negates an interesting rumination on painted space because the potential for a specific reading of collage as source material is too much to get away from.

Conversely, the backdrop paintings open up and allow for plenty of room to move. Take **Cosmo(Backdrop)** for instance, from far away, Cosmo reads like a grand landscape with a daytime sky. As you approach the painting and the components become clearer, the spatial relationships become more complex and we are denied our initial feeling of concrete clarity. Is this a painting of a painting or a painting of a scene painted on some sort of backdrop? And just like that, the space collapses.

Two important shadows drive this collapse, one cast on the "sky" from what appears to be a modernist sculpture made of simple geometric shapes on top of an ancient looking column and the second cast by the "sky" itself on a surface presumably just behind. While attempting to make sense of this space a cast of characters appear on cue to conflate any sense of order. Hard edge, stenciled flora that physically juts out of the canvas, a curious delicate mobile floating somewhere in front and the fact that this "sky" is a thick mess of paint that appears to be slathered on with a knife (which

betrays any sense of lightness that a painting of a sky should have) all conspire against any easy reading. **Cosmo(Background)** has contradictions to spare, contradictions in space and scale delivered in a pleasing palette of blues, purple, mocha and red serve not to confuse but to create the kind of space necessary for real philosophical thought.

If our friends are allies out of choice, our neighbors could be seen as allies out of necessity. While all of the pieces in *The Friends and Neighbors Effect* seem to belong, only a few of them will remain true friends. **Cosmo(Backdrop)** and the other backdrop paintings command attention with a satisfying color palette and hold our interest with the tensions of many contradictions challenging us to find something larger just under their rich surfaces.