



Brooklyn Dispatches: Cool Island and Garden of Chill

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by James Kalm

Urban tri-athletes seeking real refreshment can dive into the bay and swim four hundred yards due east to the base of Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue. Jog a few blocks further to Metaphor Contemporary's *Back to the Garden*. This show, which takes its title from the Joni Mitchell song "Woodstock," presents the work of eleven artists all using some extrapolation of the classic "flowers in a still life" theme.

Monopolizing the central atrium like Jack's beanstalk is "Tree" by Melanie Fischer. Its twisting tendrils give the impression they're growing and grasping as you watch, like a sentient Gothic vegetable from Tim Burton. The painters Ketta Ioannidou, Jung Hyang Kim, and Callie Danae Hirsch mimic the growth patterns of plants in the development of their painterly abstractions. Their pictures' arrival at subtle floral evocations seems almost coincidental. Amy Talluto's "Thicket," the only straight-ahead landscape in the show, and Susan Homer's small still lives with birds (in which the only floral references are wallpaper or tablecloth patterns) make up the traditional contingent of the show. They breathe fresh life into these classic motifs through keyed-up color, a facility for brushwork and an emphasis on abstract compositional devices. The bouquet as icon would aptly describe the paintings of Cara Enteles and Julia Schwadron, though there the similarities end. Schwadron isolates a hanging bunch of ghostly white flowers on a reductive black ground, like a wreath on a monument to the Minimalist paintings of Reinhardt and Stella. In contrast, Enteles paints a garland with aplomb in vibrant autumnal tones that bespeaks of harvest time, provoking a premature nostalgia over the shortness of summer.

Rachel Selekman in "Yellow Velvet Spray" riffs on the readymade by fabricating galvanized watering cans with multiple spouts that jet out bunches of yellow flowers instead of water—a simple but effective piece that put me in the mood to visit my local nursery. Ilene Sunshine contributes an amorphous organdy wall sculpture whose image oscillates between a succulent blossom and a sea anemone. The hot red pigment on the tips of this spiky form seem to float on its translucent mesh skin, delivering a vaporous quality unobtainable in flat painting.

In "Theft in Paradise" Tim McDowell peers through the veils of the moment, combining the timelessness of ancient Asia with contemporary Pop. On warm golden grounds he appropriates Persian miniatures and Hindu and Tantric manuscripts, abrading the surfaces to simulate age and inducing dreamlike visions of Shiva the Destroyer, or perhaps, as Joni sings: "the bombers/Riding shotgun in the sky/...turning into butterflies/Above our nation." I feel cooler already.