



At Bryan Ohno, paintings that play with reality

Review of Allan Packer show at Bryan Ohno Gallery, paintings that show Packer's trademark bold colors, geometric shapes, mystical creatures, surprising juxtapositions and optical illusions.

By Nancy Worssam

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Allan Packer, an award-winning sculptor and artist, is a student of mathematics, physics and non-Western cultures. All of these interests come into play in his audacious artwork.

Expect the unexpected here: Dragons, massive stone birds, vortices, space vehicles, rock formations. Art meets science in an explosion of forms and carefully chosen colors.

Raised on the East Coast, Packer sought out new experiences and diverse locales as an adult, all of which contribute to his art. There was an extended stay working with native printmakers in an Inuit village in Cape Dorset, Alaska; study in the Paris atelier of the artist/scientist Stanley William Hayter; years in New York City; and explorations of the great open expanses of New Mexico. These sojourns are all reflected in the paintings now on display at the Bryan Ohno Gallery.

Though he is equally recognized for his sculpture, Packer has populated this show with seven large-scale oils on canvas. They exhibit his trademark bold colors, geometric shapes, mystical creatures, surprising juxtapositions and optical illusions. But do also notice their massive, hand-tooled frames. Each is highly textured, and each has a symbol centered in the bottom of the frame. The infinity symbol is on one, and there also are symbols for earth and water. It takes some study to make the connection between the symbol and the painting.



One of my favorite works is “LANL 33.” The title comes from a sign on the chainlink fence enclosing the large radio dish located close to Bandolier National Monument and near Los Alamos National Labs (LANL). Here, modern and ancient humans looked into the sky, marveled at the moon, studied its changes. The ancients left their petroglyphs. The moderns left the atomic bomb. Elements of both cultures are included within the painting.



“Les Callanques” is Packer’s stylized landscape of an inlet in the Mediterranean shoreline, not far from Antibes. Here the limestone coast is typified by steep-sided indentations formed by thousands of years of erosion as the sea eats into the stone. Packer



depicts the rocky bluffs overlooking the narrow, steep-walled recess where beach and the sea meet as stylized blocks, piled one above the other. Above these cliffs is a tranquil sky, done in soft colors. Below, the sea washes gently onto the shore. Yet in startling fashion, emerging from a vortex at the mouth of the inlet, are three dragon heads. Not just any dragons; these are Welsh

dragons. Packer is of Welsh heritage. As they were being drawn, Packer received news of his father’s death.

Mystical and modern, art joined with science; there’s much to appreciate in this exhibit.

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