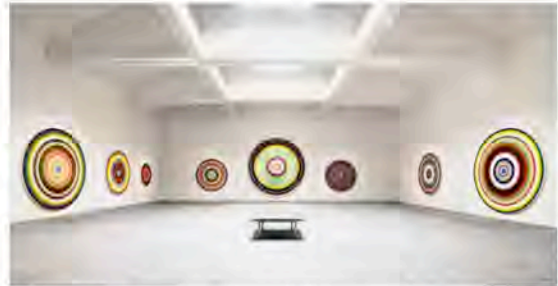


## GARY LANG

1/15/10

ACE

by Janet Koplos



View of Gary Lang's exhibition "Circles, Lines, Grids," 2009, acrylic-on-canvas paintings; at Ace.

**BEVERLY HILLS** The two small rooms at the front of this gallery both did and didn't prepare the viewer for what was to come. The small selections of Gary Lang's paintings of horizontal lines in one room and of "plaids" in the other, all made in the last decade or so, demonstrated his work's characteristic richness of color. Even during the several stretches when Lang was living in New York, including the years 1984 to 2001, his palette suggested California warmth and brightness, and now that he's back on the West Coast the paintings seem quite at home. While not fluorescent or searingly tropical, the colors always seem to capture light, and convey freshness—as well as a sort of tenderness—whatever the hue.

The works in the small galleries also gave evidence of his established process: each line is composed of pulses of color that reveal the depletion and reloading of his brush. There is no spraying, taping or polishing to perfection, but there is evidence of layering one color over another, which sometimes seems to push the top color forward and sometimes seems to draw the viewer's attention past the surface to parse the works' shadowy penitenti.

What these introductory paintings didn't suggest was the optical power of the works in the gallery's 60-by-65-foot main space, which was generously installed with 13 of Lang's concentric circle paintings. He has long used this format—the oldest work in the room dated to 1990, and the newest was finished just before the exhibition opened—in sizes up to 13 feet in diameter; here, the largest pushed against the gallery's near-20-foot-high ceiling. These tondos have a graphic pop that can stop visitors dead in their tracks. Color adjacencies make some of the rings look like they have neon lights behind them, an effect that Lang says derives from underpainting.

Roam (2008) is a good example: the circles change from dark, heavy red to a whitish yellow near the center, and it's that pale inner ring that springs forward, seemingly into the viewer's space. Full Circle (1990) is more modest in size (7 feet in diameter) and lacks the large areas of striking contrast, but it is no less graphic. From a distance, its narrower bands (reds and blue-purples predominate) have their own kind of pulse, evoking the inward-pouring rings that are sometimes used in films to represent loss of consciousness or time travel. Up close, the impact comes from the same trail of process that one saw in the other paintings: the varying load of the brush and the artist's arm movement yield a more personal but equally memorable throb.

## AROUND THE GALLERIES

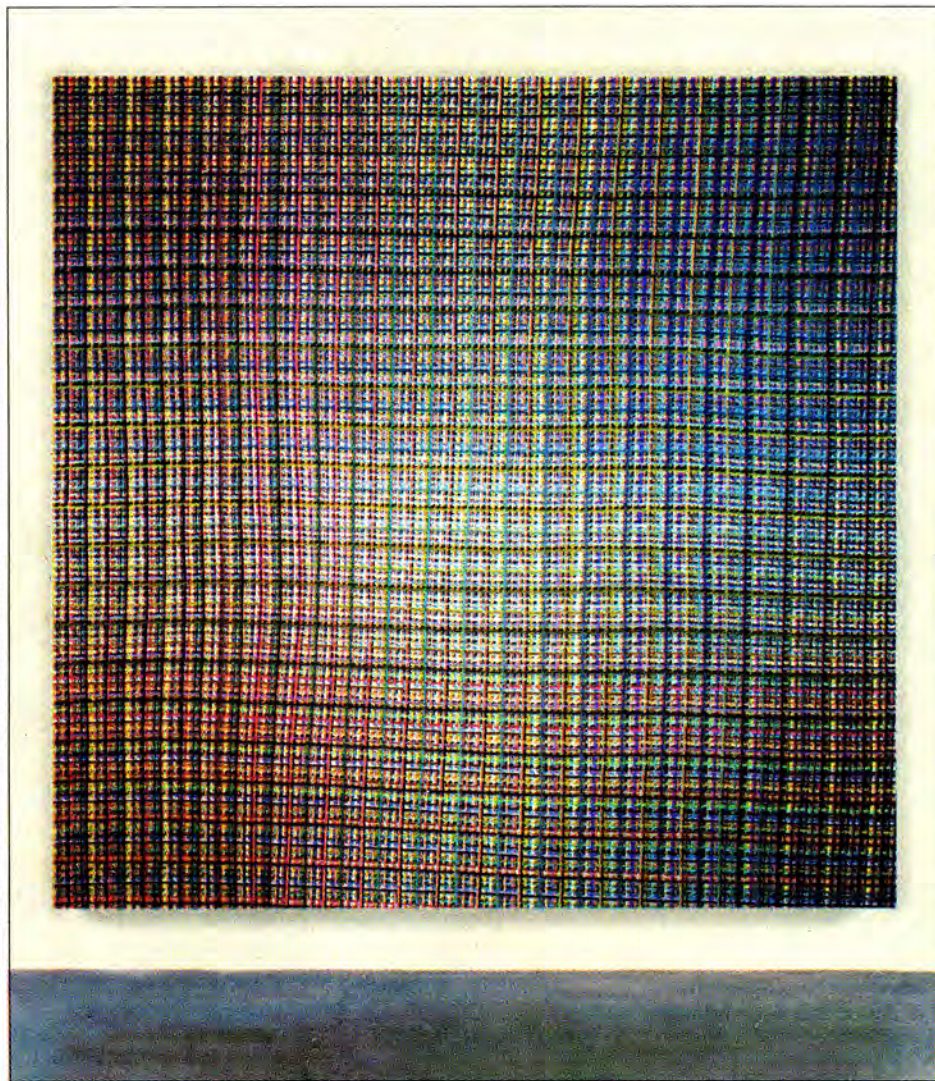
## Intense, colorful, bold . . . and kind

LEAH OLLMAN

Endearing is an odd term to describe Gary Lang's work, which, over the decades, has come across more immediately as bold, busy and chromatically intense. But at their best, Lang's paintings testify profoundly to individual presence, to the utterly human manifestations of hand and breath. They can, somewhat surprisingly, incite tenderness.

Lang's first L.A. show in 25 years, at Ace Gallery's Beverly Hills location, gives occasion to explore both the elasticity and consistency of the artist's range. Lang (who is also a sculptor) was born in L.A. and attended CalArts before moving east to study at Yale. He has lived on both coasts, and now resides in Ojai. Since the late '70s, his art has concentrated on pattern, rhythm, repetition, vibrant color and surface energy. He once incorporated found, pop culture imagery into his work but for the last 20 years has pared down his visual vocabulary to the basic elements of line and color.

The show starts on an intimate scale, with a small gallery of paintings of stacked lines and another of grids (he calls them "plaids"), then breaks open with a cavernous gallery of round canvases with concentric circles. Newer work prevails, but a few older pieces are sprinkled into the mix, going as far back as 1990. There are some clumsy pieces here, with unredemptive dissonances and



Ace Gallery

**A GRID LOCK:** Artist Gary Lang calls works such as "Mirror 113," which measures a little more than nine feet square and is on display at Ace Gallery in Beverly Hills, "plaids."

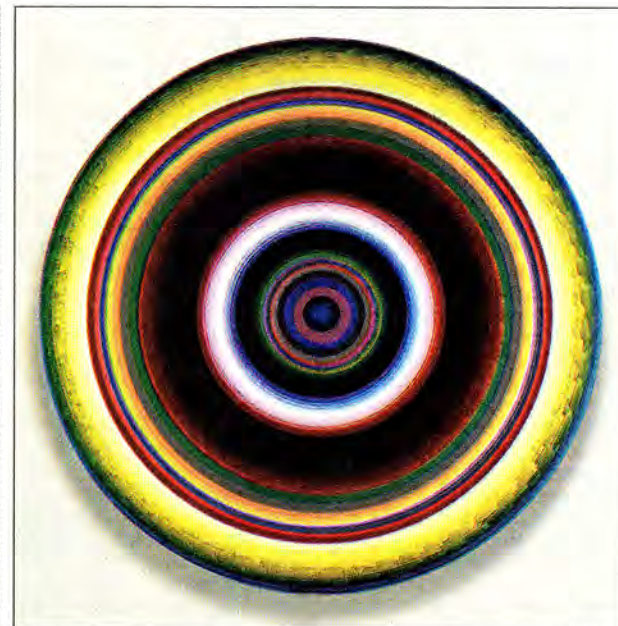
awkward rhythms, but more than a few marvels — ravishing examples of Lang's humble exuberance.

"Mirror 113" is just such a stunner. The 2008 canvas measures just over nine feet square. Its network of narrow (about one-quarter-inch) horizontal and vertical stripes veers slightly off course, just enough to assert Lang's respect for manual imperfection over mechanical efficiency, and to sug-

gest an inviting tapestry rather than a forbidding cage. The lines of color shift from warm to cool, intense to faint, deepening and darkening toward the edges. The painting is a gem of subtle undulation, a dance between openness and enclosure, surface and depth.

The line paintings are similarly involving. They have a private, quiet feeling to them, whether roughly two-by-four feet or eight-by-five. Lang lays

down one thin horizontal line after another, traversing the canvas in solid, strong colors, the lines a little rough around the edges sometimes, tilting and occasionally overlapping. Again, absolute regularity and evenness count for little. What matters is the simple repetition of the act, driven by the eye and the arm. The line reads as literal and metaphoric at once, a record and a gesture, dense with reference to mark-making



Ace Gallery

**ON TARGET:** Rings of stop/start strokes seem to race each other around the circle in Gary Lang's "Roam."

of the past but persuasive in its pure immediacy.

Tensions play out vigorously within these paintings: between the discipline of each format and Lang's lavish freedom with color; between the sobriety of the reductive geometries and the revelry of his idiosyncratic hand; between a yearning for harmony and the impulse toward disorder. The works are surprisingly resonant, emotionally.

The paintings of concentric bands of color are more aggressive and less absorbing. They measure up to 13 feet in diameter (the aptly named "Goliath") and present a target-like challenge. Illusionistically eye-popping from a distance, the circles vibrate and pulse, their spectrum of colors all-inclusive: luminous, flat, sweet, sharp, Day-Glo, metallic, shrill and sexy. In such a large group (13), the intensity can feel relentless, but there are delicate, gorgeous passages to be found, like the progression of white to yellow to green to blue around the outer rim of "Roam," rings of stop-start strokes that seem

to race each other around the circle. And in "Full Circle," dark rays painted beneath the rings make the colors flicker and dim, gently interrupting the circular momentum.

Lang's work positions itself comfortably within the continuum of artists using a similarly distilled vocabulary — Kenneth Noland, Agnes Martin, among others. The strength of his work has less to do with invention than interpretation, with the inescapably singular, internal process of making external marks.

**Ace Gallery Beverly Hills,** 9430 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills, (310) 858-9090, through Aug. 29. Closed Sunday and Monday. [www.acegallery.net](http://www.acegallery.net)

# ARTS&CULTURE

## 'Heavy Light' explores limitless world of digital art at Quint gallery

By Christine Clark  
LA JOLLA LIGHT

The growing medium of digital art will receive its moment in the spotlight in La Jolla at an upcoming exhibition. Quint Contemporary Art is bringing the work of cutting-edge new media artists such as Lincoln Schatz, Gary Lang and John Gerrard to La Jolla for an exhibition titled "Heavy Light," that will run from Friday, Nov. 17, to Dec. 30.

Digital art is a relatively new medium, and local museums and galleries have recently been featuring it, but the Quint gallery is featuring the "Heavy Light" exhibition because it wanted to be on the forefront of the genre, said Quint Art Director Ben Strauss-Malcolm.

"The show is a first of its kind in the San Diego area," he said. "We have been working with some of these artists for quite a while and this is a chance to let them showcase their work. We wanted to share with our collectors as well as the public what is going on with digital art and let them interact with the work."

Some of the digital artists in the exhibition, such as Schatz, are well-established in the genre, while others, like Lang, are new to the medium.

The works in "Heavy Light" are widely varied and there are many different themes throughout the show, but a common thread is that the pieces are not

static. The images are constantly shifting.

Lincoln Schatz, who is a Chicago-based artist, will be showcasing his "Collision of Memory" series. The work features film that was recorded months ago, but it also records viewers in the present. The piece then blends the viewer's image with the existing footage.

The work is engaging because it gives viewers the opportunity to see an image projected of themselves that differs from what they are used to seeing, Schatz said.

Schatz calls the series "Collision of Memory" because it deals with how people react to images taken of them in the past.

"The content is the viewer," Schatz said. "The computer creates a portrait and an environment. ... It is like the way you experience memory, like it is a series of small events."

Schatz's work is an example of the portraiture theme that runs throughout the exhibit, Strauss-Malcolm said.

"The human body has always been a popular theme in all art," he said. "I think as far as Schatz's work goes, it is the idea that we were just fascinated to watch ourselves on the screen."

In addition to Schatz, "Heavy Light" will feature the work of Gary Lang. This is Lang's first venture into digital art, but he has been a successful painter for several years.

Lang's paintings are incredibly detailed. It takes him up to eight months to complete one painting. He said he was attracted to digital art because it would allow him to complete his work in a more time-efficient manner. However, Lang said the new medium is not a big departure for him.

"I make hypnotic paintings," Lang said. "The format of this piece is like being inside one of my paintings."

Similar to Schatz's "Collision of Memory," Lang's piece, "Dividing Time (profiles #1)," is continually changing.

"The piece is about color, speed, light, space and time," Lang said. "It is a very dense construction that is shifting continually. It is almost baroque. You can do your best to keep up with it, but what I do is keep my viewer on their toes."

Another piece that will be on display in the "Heavy Light" exhibition is John Gerrard's "Thousand Year Dawn."

The piece is a real-time video that portrays a man watching the sun rise over the ocean. The man stands at the center of the piece where sun, sky and ocean meet, but the video is continual and it conveys that the sunrise is infinite.

Although digital art exhibits such as "Heavy Light" are rare in San Diego, the medium is gaining popularity, according to Strauss-Malcolm.

"We have a culture very in tune with what is going on in TV, movies, theater and the medium has taken off," Strauss-Malcolm said. "There are certainly more collectors who are collecting the work."

However, American galleries are still behind the curve when it comes to showcasing new media art, according to Schatz.

"It is a fascinating genre, but right now there are only about 10 curators in



COURTESY

John Gerrard's 'Thousand Year Dawn' is part of the 'Heavy Light' exhibition at Quint gallery.

the U.S. that are affiliated with it, yet it has grown so much," Schatz said.

Although Lang only recently began working in media art, he said he will continue to work within the genre because it allows for viewers to interact with the art.

"Digital art is a great vehicle for hypnosis and for focusing," Lang said. "I can draw the viewer in. It is a valuable experience."

Quint Contemporary Art is at 7739 Fay Ave. Call (858) 454-3409 for more information.

# Concentric fields

Artist paints with flowers on an unpredictable garden canvas

By Robert L. Pincus  
ART CRITIC

One thing, above all else, has kept Gary Lang passionately engaged with painting for the past three decades: its unpredictability.

He doesn't rely on studies to craft his precisely plotted paintings, in which concentric circles and complexly interwoven lines dominate. He invents their palette and often their structure, too, as he goes along.

But dedication to painting aside, when curator Lynda Forsha called upon him to create in a medium wholly novel to his work, Lang didn't hesitate to accept. "My work is about dealing with uncertainty," the internationally exhibited artist declares, "and what could be more unpredictable than flowers.

"I don't know much about flowers," he admits. "But one thing I learned in the '60s is how to change the channel. I'm just doing what I normally do in another way."

Lang is the second artist to be commissioned under the rubric of The Color Project, launched last year by The Flower Fields in Carlsbad. The first was Patricia Patterson, whose "An Enclosed Garden" remains, looking lush and even more inviting than it did in 2000. Both are part of an effort to bring the vision of artists to the medium of flora.

Lang's "Circles and Cycles, a Chance Garden" is a work in progress. This year's version might be likened to an oil sketch, since it is a fragment of his fully realized concept — a portion of the concentric circles in daisies, petunias and other flora envisioned for next year.

The arcs stretch across an area that slopes downward gently, in sweeps of red, white and green that have no set pattern but create dramatic juxtapositions. Even this early form of his garden readily pleases Lang, as did its enthusiastic reception by the groups of elementary school children and adults that strolled by during our interview.

"I've tried to organize the color symphonically," he says, alluding to the repeating colors that recur without a tidy repeating pattern.

Color is the thing that unites his paintings with his garden, along with the use of the circle.

"I've been absorbed with color since I was a child. It was always uplifting for me, even before I was a painter.

"Here," he continues, "I'm trying to mix material in a new way, flowers with herbs and vegetables, to achieve a different palette. You might say I'm trying to impressionize them."

## Native son

Patterson is local. (She lives in Leucadia.) Lang is not; the artist, lean and fit at 51, just returned to California six weeks ago after 15 years in New York's Soho district. He earned his B.F.A. in art at the then-fledgling California In-



Gary Lang's "Circles and Cycles, a Chance Garden" is taking shape alongside Carlsbad's ever-popular The Flower Fields. Jerry Rife / Union-Tribune photos

stitute of the Arts in 1973 and two years later completed an M.F.A. at Yale. Lang exhibited widely on the West Coast before moving east and continued to do so after taken up residence in Manhattan.

But he and his wife, Ruth Pastine, wanted to find a more bucolic place to raise their son, now 3, and newly arrived baby. (Pastine is also a widely exhibited painter. And like Lang, she shows at Quint Contemporary Art in La Jolla.) They took a liking to Ojai and figure it is close enough to Los Angeles to be in touch with an art center, while offering the virtues of small-town life.

Reflecting on the move from New York, Lang says, "It was time to turn our back on the merchandizing monster; we were completely fine with that. I'll miss the takeout and that's about it. My life is in the studio and I bring my studio and my heart with me wherever I go."

Don't take his words wrongly: Lang isn't about to retreat from the art world. In the immediate future are shows in Tokyo and Vienna. This summer, he'll also be seen in a show at the Oceanside Museum of Art. The show features artists who studied at Los Angeles' legendary Chouinard Art Institute and Lang did that before moving on to Cal Arts.

At the moment, he is also excited about paintings he's about to make, because they apply his cherished notion of uncertainty in a new way. The 2,000-plus hand-mixed colors he shipped from his New York studio are



White-and-yellow straw flowers are part of the palette in Gary Lang's circular floral bands.

encased in unmarked Styrofoam containers right now. And he will choose the hues for these compositions before he knows which is which.

Lang's enthusiasm for both the garden and his paintings has a boyish quality, a facet of his personality he readily acknowledges.

"Painting isn't just a career — it's a way of life, a way of operating from a primal place. It can sustain your youth throughout your life."

Robert L. Pincus can be reached by phone, (619) 293-1831; fax, (619) 293-2436; mail, P.O. Box 120191, San Diego, CA 92112-0191; or e-mail, robert.pincus@uniontrib.com.

## If you go

**What:** "Circles and Cycles, a Chance Garden," a work in progress by Gary Lang.

**Where:** The Flower Fields are located east of I-5 at the Palomar Airport Road exit. "Circles and Cycles" is south of the Armstrong Garden Center.

**Hours:** 10 a.m. to one hour before dusk daily.

**Admission:** "Circles and Cycles" is included with admission to The Flower Fields. \$5 for adults; \$4 for seniors; \$3 for children 6-12.

**Details:** To check on flower bloom and weekend events, call (760) 930-9123 or visit the Web site at [www.theflowerfields.com](http://www.theflowerfields.com).

# ARTnews

June 1997

LA JOLLA

## Gary Lang

QUINT

**L**ike a gymnast, Gary Lang concentrates on form, balance, unflagging energy, and an enticing degree of spectacle. The New York-based artist's practice is obsessive, and the results are often mesmerizing.

This show was a representative example of all those qualities. There was a grid painting, a dense plaid woven of thin bands of color to create a scintillating, vibrating depth. And there was a tondo,



Gary Lang, *Dream Twister #1*, 1996,  
acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48".  
Quint.

over five feet in diameter, whose concentric rings of color vary in width and chromatic indulgence, from frivolous pinks to serious blues and blacks. In *Conquering*—at nine feet high, the largest painting in the show—end-to-end stripes crisscross the canvas with relentless rhythm, forming what looks like a frozen morass of pick-up sticks. The wild freedom of Lang's palette and his highly controlled, tight patterning yield a rich friction that saves the paintings from visual gridlock. Fuguelike in their layered complexity, these works have a manic beauty.

In the "Dream Twister" paintings, Lang exposes some refreshing heart and humor, qualities that are reminiscent of his ragged patchwork paintings of the 1980s. In all three "Dream Twister" versions here, but especially in #3, the angularity of the show's other paintings gives way to an almost orgiastic quality. Here, Lang's characteristic reiterated bands of color bend and arch, loop and bulge into indecipherable tangles, vaguely organic and sensuous. Among the brown, black, white, and olive bands gleam strands of Day-Glo pink, orange, and green. A coy coda to Pollock's linear webs, "Dream Twister" celebrates painting as a rapturous physical act. These works are as process-oriented as the grids and tondos but without such a rigorous format.

LEAH OLLMAN



# art of excess

ON ENERGY ALONE, LANG'S CANVASES HIT THE BULL'S-EYE

BY ROBERT L. PINCUS / ART CRITIC

**S**tare long enough at Gary Lang's handsomely painted version of a circular target at the Quint Gallery and you're likely to feel dizzy.

Perhaps it's the size of the concentric circles that keeps you from focusing on the canvas, which is about 5½ feet in diameter. Or perhaps it's Lang's palette: The represented hues, among them deep purple and bright orange, are metallic and deliberately unnatural.

Lang has long been into excess. In the early '80s, he composed paintings that were a broad patchwork of images and abstract flourishes. By the late '80s, these images had given way to a field of orbs. Targets became frequent by 1990, the year he last had a solo show with Quint.

Now his targets are outnumbered by other motifs: patterns of curved and arching lines that reach from side to side, top to bottom. The effect is akin to that of a tapestry or an intricate puzzle. It's probably wise that Lang is giving the targets a lower profile, since no matter how deftly rendered, any artist's version of them sends us back to Jasper Johns' great version of the same, and pales in the end.

The most intriguing of Lang's six exhibited pictures is called "Conquering." It's not at all clear why the painting bears this title, but the complexity of the canvas is hypnotic. He piles lines upon lines, angled every which way, making it look as if there is an infinitely deep space within the surface of the picture. At the same time, if you blink and look again, it can become a densely adorned flat surface.

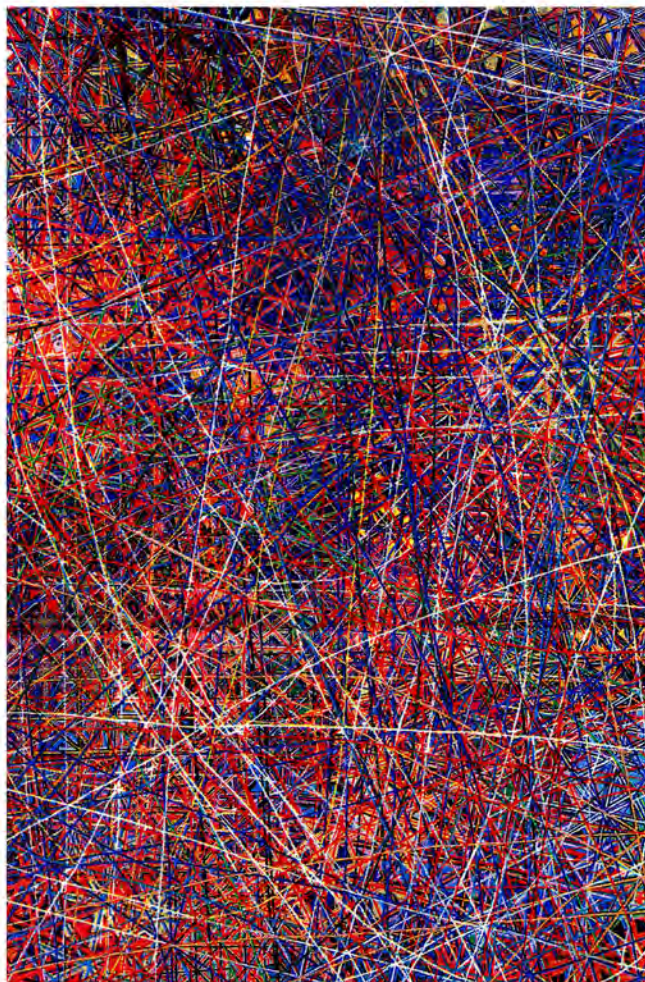
Lang represents abstraction in its mannered phase. You can't get more perfect, in an austere way, than the Minimalist box (Donald Judd) or the single-color shape on the wall (Ellsworth Kelly). He goes the other way, pushing the complexity of the picture plane to its limits. The energy emanating from these canvases is undeniable. But is there as much direction in his art as energy? It doesn't appear so — though to be fair, this show offers a narrow snapshot of Lang, circa 1997.

## Pursuing the rectangle

Staying simple doesn't assure an artist of an escape from mannerism, either. David Lasry's current output, on view at the SOMA Gallery (7661 Girard Ave., 551-5821, through March 29), proves the point. Like many an abstract painter, he passionately pursues the most radiant use of the rectangle.

His pieces aren't so much paintings as painted constructions — mounted on the wall. The two largest examples look like top-heavy T's. As with every other object in Lasry's show, their palettes are stark: limited to black and white. They're handsome but little more, with their rectangle-covered surfaces.

Smaller objects by Lasry, carrying names like "Untitled (Cube #2)" and



Gary Lang's "Conquering," part of the "Paintings" exhibition at Quint Gallery in La Jolla through March 29.

"Untitled (Dec. #1)", are just plain clunky. They are squat little forms, painted on all of their various sides — also in economical patterns of black and white.

Lasry's constructions, whether long or squat, are well-made, dull additions to the Minimalist tradition. His prints are more absorbing. In one of them, the same top-heavy T shows in a pale blue, centered on soft, white, handmade paper. The blue is lush, the surface of the paper beautiful. Lasry's monoprints give decorative art a good name.

Suzanne Caporael, exhibiting concurrently at the SOMA Gallery, employs lush color, too, in a painting where a rectangle of deep red seems to hover against a translucent surface that fuses gray and green. The painting, done on muslin stretched over wood, is part of a first show for the artist in San Diego.

Though she now lives in semi-rural Lompoc, Caporael still is associated with the Los Angeles scene. (She gained a name there in the '80s.) But her move in 1989 precipitated a shift from cryptic, surreal imagery to abstract compositions rooted in her observations of nature and scientific classification of the natural world.

Caporael's art has a subdued, meditative quality. You feel as if her recent paintings rest squarely in a tradition that reaches back to John McLaughlin's Zenlike abstractions of the '50s and '60s. As a group, her art isn't terribly revelatory, but it does exude a quiet integrity.

## Looking within

Mark Perlman's solo exhibition at the R.B. Stevenson Gallery (7661 Girard Ave., 456-0392, through Saturday) is in a different tradition of abstraction: the painting as metaphor for the psyche. He's indebted to early Abstract Expressionism, the sort of paintings Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb made when they were trying to bring myth into art as the '30s shaded into the '40s.

His pictures suggest the passage of time. With their scratched, scarred and incised

surfaces, they resemble old walls. Colors that evoke rust and grime — pale oranges, reds and browns — are prevalent, and it's not surprising to learn that Perlman grew up in an old steel town outside Pittsburgh. As a child, he was fascinated with its aging buildings. "The beauty was in the decay," he once recalled.

Within his busy surfaces, Perlman embeds borrowed images, many of which evoke a baby-boom childhood. They're usually half painted-over, partially obscured, as if to suggest the mental and emotional distance between the artist and the artist as child.

Perlman, a professor at California State University Sonoma, has devised a style in these paintings that looks rough-hewn but is carefully honed. Little images compete with large, loosely suggested ones, as with the vase-shaped contour in "Grey Basin."

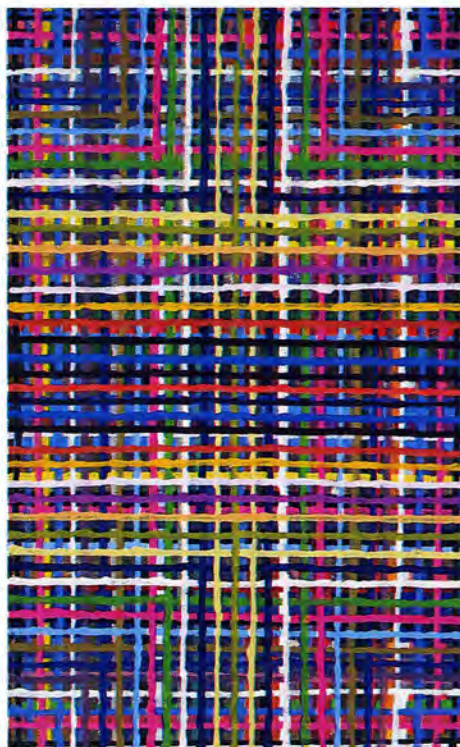
There is a sameness to his surfaces that diminishes the viewer's interest. He needs to do more with either the collage elements of his paintings or the large, loosely suggested images to persuade viewers to be companions on his journey within.

# Art in America

## Gary Lang at Julian Pretto

It's not often that one comes across geometric abstract painting as ingratiating as Gary Lang's. Though extremely complex, his images are generated from a very basic idea and procedure: overlaid bands of color of equal width covering the entire surface of the canvas. In earlier paintings, the bands radiated outward in compacted snowflake patterns of different size that encircled or overlapped each other, and seemed to bubble across the picture plane. For this show, however, Lang stuck to a single format of interweaving horizontal and vertical bands that emphasize the rectilinearity of the canvases and the essential flatness of the picture plane. Old news, to be sure, but this is just a prelude to the observer's renewed appreciation of unexpected effects of light and space, and a considerable degree of play in what at first seems to be highly plotted work.

Lang softens the geometric ordering of his imagery by making each band of color an extended free-hand gesture (there may have been ruled lines laid down in the beginning, but they've been buried by the buildup of color). The width of the bands varies according to the size of the canvas, ranging from pencil-thin in the smallest vertical paintings (about a foot high) to a couple of inches wide in the largest square works. Lang uses striking combinations of brilliant hues and softly atmospheric modulations. Some of his colors look almost fluorescent while others in the same painting would be just as at home among the foggy middle-range hues of a Morandi. The color is further enriched through underpainting. When Lang saturates an area of paint with gel medium to achieve transparency, he provides darker contrasting color underneath to lend depth and body.



Gary Lang: *Untitled*, 1988, vinyl acrylic on canvas, 14 by 8½ inches; at Julian Pretto.

In Lang's paintings, a refreshed modernist classicism stands forth. What makes them modern is not a nostalgia for purist geometry and interactive color, but rather a contemporary awareness of the virtues of equivocation. Nothing is hard-edged in these paintings. They have flexibility and illumined depths. Systems of crossing bands start up and break down, and established color progressions are overtaken by whim ("The hell with it, I'll put *this color here*"). The ongoing exchange between strictness and freedom in Lang's paintings is deeply satisfying.

—Stephen Westfall



COURTESY MARK QUINT GALLERY

**Gary Lang, *Barefoot in the Studio—Better than Milk*, 1986, oil on canvas, 80 by 54 inches.**

## San Diego

### GARY LANG

Mark Quint

**T**HERE is little gravity, either physical or emotional, in Lang's paintings. Vibrant patches of pattern and fragments of magazine- and comic strip-derived imagery hover in momentary unity, together not for any appointed purpose, but because a fever has sealed them there. Lang's world resembles Jonathan Borofsky's in its energy, abundance and democratic treatment of passing thoughts. But rather than paying homage to each notion individually, Lang gathers his responses, pulverizes them en masse, then weaves them anew into compressed webs of color. For all of their fragmentation, the paintings hold together. Rhythmic schemes within apparent disorder and a consistency of touch lend the works a crazy-quilt coherence. The tightest works achieve a synergistic power through

the clean, seamless fusion of their parts. In a small number of others, such dynamism has failed, expired; muddiness intrudes, and the whole crumbles and dissolves.

Each of the large paintings on paper (60 by 40 inches) was paired in this exhibition with a smaller canvas (most, approximately 19 by 13 inches) sharing the same title and general composition. That the paintings come in pairs yields no particular insight into Lang's method or intent, for the relationships between smaller and larger works vary. Some small ones preceded their larger counterparts as more spontaneous studies; others followed their pendants as concise abbreviations. The imagery expands and contracts, irrespective of scale. Both large and small pieces are capable of glistening like gems, their tightly bound facets bursting with saturated color.

Along the edge of one small canvas, *The Loss Promotes the Gain*, runs a band of brushstrokes, each representing a color used within the rest of the painting. This practice recalls Seurat, father to Lang's edict that the viewer construct a unified image from the painter's disparate marks. No rules of optics guide the instincts here, however. The eye flits and scrambles across the explosive surface, sufficiently seduced by its chaotic path.

Lang's thoroughly engaged surfaces are interspersed with forms and color combinations appropriated from art and from popular illustration—red, white and blue airplanes, woozy Op-art patterns in fluorescent green and orange, zebra stripes, leopard spots and Mickey Mouses. An ambiguous balance between the recognizable (or accessible) and the evasive is skillfully exploited, producing a sense of controlled tension. The tone remains light, though, due to titles such as *No Day at the Beach* and *Zulu Jive*. Well protected by his earlier pieces—the threatening yet erotic hand-held “Weapons”—Lang can now revel exuberantly in weightless odes to seeing.

—Leah Goldman



# Los Angeles Times

## PAINTINGS THAT DEFY DESCRIPTION

By ROBERT McDONALD

**S**AN DIEGO—Gary Lang's paintings are outrageous. They would wake up the dead with their visual cacophony. They have brought violent reactions from visitors to the Mark Quint Gallery with their assault on the eyes and on their preconceptions about what a painting should look like.

If it is true, as Walter Pater wrote in the last century, that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music," then Gary Lang's paintings aspire toward the condition of hard rock.

The artist confided modestly during an interview: "Yeah, looking at them doesn't come easy."

How can inert objects create such a fuss, without even being obscene, violent or sacrilegious?

How does one describe the indescribable? And perhaps unreproducible?

Images and patterns are jammed together on the surface of the canvas in every color available. They do not jostle one another because there is no space for jostling in their visual gridlock.

They do, however, flicker and pulsate. They even seem infinitely expandable. And as you look at them, they seem to change.

"It's just like watching clouds," Lang said.

His congeries on canvas include bananas, strawberries, plums, Minnie Mouse, robots, a monkey's face, an Indian head, Raggedy Ann, cornucopias, a pirate's flag, cucumbers, red parrots, the forehead and

one eye of James Dean, parts of words, bunnies, part of the facade of a public building in the Federal style, green onion tops, a blue piano keyboard, a rainbow-colored scarf, a roast turkey metamorphosing into a pink elephant (or vice versa), a nude Snow White (upside down but coquettish) and cave drawings. Then there are glimpses of seascapes, landscapes, "skyscapes" and "urbanscapes." And there are many brightly colored, decorative squares like those that grandmothers knit and assemble for quilts.

Lang's procedure, he said, is "to start out with as much as I can and then add to it."

He wants his surfeited canvases to be "so ambiguous you can bring up your own associations. They're supposed to function personally. They don't say just one thing."

His paintings are like perpetual sense perceptions, simultaneously coming at us from all directions without the intervention of our consciousness to sort them out and order them. Or they're like the ideas and impressions that pester us when we've awakened in the middle of the night and are desperate to fall asleep again.

In their crowdedness and evocativeness, they resemble the works of artists as different from one another as Terry Allen and Manny Farber. In their dense structure, they are as complex as the geometric paintings of Al Held (with whom Lang studied at Yale). In their patterning, they are as rich as the fabric paintings of Lucas Simaras or old-fashioned patchwork quilts.

A curious reversal of traditional procedure, Lang customarily be-



One of artist Gary Lang's action-packed paintings on display at Quint Gallery in San Diego.

gins with a large canvas, composing improvisationally, then makes a smaller version, refining the essence of the image. Several pairs of works at the Quint Gallery are installed in such a way, although not adjacent to one another, that it is possible for viewers to study them comparatively.

An articulate artist, Lang has summarized his ambition in these works: "I want to push the power of images and of color as far as possible. But what I'm really interested in is the primal energy behind the images. I want to create the look of the rhythm of life."

You may hate Gary Lang's paintings. But you won't forget them or their severe *joie de vivre*. The exhibit runs through Oct. 11.

## Fay & Lang exhibit here

Painting and sculpture by Los Angeles artists Joe Fay and Gary Lang will be shown at the Quint Gallery, opening tomorrow, and continuing through July 24. A reception for the artists will be held tomorrow from 7 to 9 p.m.

Joe Fay's paintings consist of flat surfaces in which simple figurative elements such as animals, buildings and airplanes are framed by gaudy patterns of flower and leaf forms. The paint is poured on the canvas and then worked with a stylus to create spiny detailed shapes.

The sculptural weapons by Gary Lang are sensitively shaped art objects on the one hand, and brutal weapons on the other hand. The materials include rubber, metal, enamel and plastic.

The gallery is located at 7521 La Jolla Blvd. Phone 454-1952 for information.



Pictured against a backdrop of their native city are Los Angeles artists Gary Lang, left, and Joe Fay. Paintings and sculpture by the artists will be on display

starting tomorrow at the Quint Gallery and continuing through July 24. A reception for the artists will be held tomorrow from 7 to 9 p.m.