

Art News: McCampbell And Mendez Go for the Gold

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(UNASSIGNED)

Rachael McCampbell and Valerie Mendez are longtime residents of the Santa Monica/Venice area. Both are exhibiting currently at T.A.G. Gallery. Although their subjects are quite different, they share an affinity for the color gold – and possibly for painting their dreams.

McCampbell, who grew up on a farm in Tennessee, loves horses, and her paintings in this show are all of horses, in an acrylic palette of brown, gold, and gray. In her artists' statement, McCampbell notes that "it's been said that horses are the projection of our dreams about ourselves (our inner strength and power)." Her horses indeed seem to be running in a dream landscape. When the bodies and limbs of the horses are seen in the foreground, other horses are glimpsed behind them, in outline or fading into the mist. While some of this is the craft at work – McCampbell mixes dirt into her paint and uses scratching and sanding for effect – the blurred parts of her paintings also suggest the speed of the horses' movements and the ephemeral nature of the racing horses themselves.

Sometimes, as in "From Bitter Searching of the Heart, We Rise to Play a Greater Part," the horses appear to be vanishing in a cloud of "dust" created with silvery acrylic paint. In "Sky Riders" a single horse's hoof is boldly visible, but other horse's legs are seen in a blur, as if running too fast to be detected by the naked eye.

In "Primal Memory," a large canvas that evokes the equine panoramas of Rosa Bonheur, several horses have stopped to drink the water in a stream – but above them can be seen horses in outline, galloping within a cloud. So in McCampbell's vision, the horses themselves have dreams.

Valerie Mendez's "Tales From the Pacific" started with a poem of that name, an "abbreviated tribute to a day in the Pacific Ocean." Each of her paintings uses a line from the poem as a starting point. Her work explores "obscuring and revealing," with the painting being done in oil and acrylic on layers of Plexiglas. Circles are a dominant shape, and warm browns, beiges, and gold leaf are the prevailing colors.

The use of shapes does not always follow the themes suggested by the lines of poetry. "Mountains Broke the Horizon" is a pyramid of gold against a blue background, while "Ocean Sifted Midday Heat" presents a swirling ring of brown streaked with gold leaf. Looking closely, one can see tiny blue dots amidst the "midday heat" of the ring.

"Latitudes Entrapped the Moon" uses strips of gold leaf to form a criss-crossed sphere. The gold lines resemble the latitude-longitude lines on typical globes of the earth – but this is supposed to be the moon. No matter. Mendez's concept of the sun, seen in "Dawn Rushed the Sky" is a brownish circle, touched with gold leaf, within a darker penumbra.