

Experiencing Rational Exuberance

The luminous and enigmatic works of Chalda Maloff captivate the viewer with a confluence of art and science. Calligraphic lines course through her paintings before dissolving into pools of shimmering color, while elsewhere tiny ink droplets cluster in schooling formations. These spots call to mind metamorphic transformation, or Art Nouveau pottery and glass; semi-transparent and ethereal. There is the sensation of floating. Other more geometric works challenge the relationship between free association and underlying structures.

In principle, Maloff's works are the visual gestalt of digital processes. Trained early in computer science, the artist embraces art making as virtual bricolage, or intuitive construction of imagery and resources that already exist in the collective social consciousness. This exhibit therefore is a culmination of years of experimentation and growth, as the artist skillfully composes organic figurations through the latest software. The viewer is tempted to search for photographic origins in her work to ground the subjects in the corporeal world before recognizing their genesis as fully developed digital creations.

Unmarked Door, as one of the more abstract pieces in the exhibition, still bears semblance to an exotic marine animal. Unfolding into relieved bilateral symmetry, the ambiguity of form is part of its allure. The winged shape suggests a cruciform entity, crossing unto itself with a repeated interior pattern. It can naturally be read as figurative, revealing a deep blue- violet interior against a glistening cream background as it unfolds. It is sensuous, but ultimately exhibits a graphic presence.

Scale and proportion call to mind micro/macrocosmic relationships in Maloff's work, such as in the digital painting titled *Altar of Secrets*. Nothing less than the mysteries of the universe are brought forth in the complexly knotted round shape spilling out countless pink seeds. The organic configuration and tinted color scheme are arguably feminine, at least in the broader Jungian sense of regeneration and renewal. Bands of white light cross the space, acting as bursts of pure energy or light. It's as if we're witness to transfiguration in flux.

The body of work occasionally surprises with small vignettes of representational imagery. *The Kiss* initially evokes Gustav Klimt's celebrated work by the same title. But Maloff's piece readily dissolves the Viennese master painting of decoration and figuration into an unearthly apparition. Absent is her suitor; her facial expression adrift atop a celestial body. Biomorph designs echoed on each side nearly replicate each other, and suggest the duality of lips about to meet. The woman stands in the space between, in anticipation. *Words in the Margins* is alternately jarring in its asymmetrical balance, and suggests separate windows of space colliding in a pre-destined arrangement. The recognizable female face in the upper left quadrant is a disparate element, only as we see ourselves apart from nature, mirrored in its unfathomable wake. But Maloff weaves these subjects together with a fluidity that asserts with brave certainty we are not separate from our cells.

Just as the larger works were created to human scale, the smaller pieces in the show are intimate in size. They are also to varying degrees more representational in subject matter. The artist gives us several up-close renderings of fish, using them as transmitters of energy and the basic life force. Elemental creatures, they survive mostly by instinct buried deep within their genetic code. Maloff doesn't shy away from

spiritual overtones in her work, understanding there is always more than meets the eye and spirit must guide intellect. She boldly extends visual splendor as a luxury, or even necessity of the soul. In *Strobe Light* and *Holiday Light* fish appear suspended in open air because of the white background. Rather than swimming in saturated pigments, they swim into light. *Alabaster Marble* conversely exhibits a lush surround. Turquoise and yellow bubbling waters exude radiance and dreamlike otherworldliness. The smooth surface in the presentation of these works further enhances this illusion of aqueous suspension. Floating without constraints of a traditional frame, the paintings become illusive objects, defying the suspension of weight in their inherent formation from paper, ink and clear acrylic.

Maloff's world view travels throughout her work, and can be seen as a conscious optimism and faith in the order of things. There is a joyful awareness in creation. But she also leaves us room for mystery. She understands this perceived natural order must occasionally be overthrown to make way for a new artistic vision- and indeed, sublime beauty. Her digital paintings reveal an artist deeply connected to her visual practice, as the resilience of this new body of work affirms exploration within a personally constructed language. Traces of human fingerprints are embedded into her works, acting as faint vestiges of the personal in the universal. While clearly the products of a digital age, Maloff's artworks entrance us with a timeless spirit. I am delighted to see these pieces brought together for this exhibition that she has aptly titled *Rational Exuberance*.