

Kayne Griffin Corcoran

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Critics Choice: Group Show at Kayne Griffin Corcoran Delivers Beauty With an Occasional Bite



Linda Stark, "Spectacled Cobra," 2005, oil on canvas over panel. (Robert Wedemeyer / Linda Stark and Kayne Griffin Corcoran)

The two paintings by Agnes Pelton in the group show "The Ocular Bowl" make a visit to Kayne Griffin Corcoran worthwhile — and then some.

Painted in 1929, "Star Gazer" is a riveting picture of a stylized flower set before an abstract landscape at dusk. Its deep blue night sky is pierced by the dazzling light of a single star.

"Passion Flower," painted in 1943, depicts a fanciful flower that is illuminated from within and hovers in midair. Its casual majesty is accentuated by a trio of buds whose impossibly thin stems twist sinuously. Some end in dark green leaves that seem to be liquid.

Both show Pelton (1881-1961) at her best, distilling the beauty of the natural world in crystalline pictures that heighten our capacity to sense the magnificence of the cosmos.

Six oils on canvas by Linda Stark and six paintings by Alex Olson add to the splendor. All three artists treat the visible world as a portal to the soul.

Simplicity and patience are Stark's hallmarks. Her images are basic: the back of a hooded cobra, a necklace hanging over Stonehenge, a bird's-eye view of a pyramid and a close-up of a belly button.

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Her textures are complex. Stark sculpts paint with tiny knives, applying it in single strokes to create surfaces that are rippled, like storm-tossed seas, or chiseled, like rough-cut stones.

Olsen does something similar. Creating multilayered images, her pictures of pitchers filled with mysterious liquids in which float geometric forms are worlds within worlds. Never hermetic, her abstract and representational images insist that paintings are meant to be looked at and looked through.

Mystery whispers through all of the works in "The Ocular Bowl." Its Realism is magical, a matter of making connections — and fostering relationships — between ordinarily overlooked intuitions and the things from which they spring.

- David Pagel