

Surface Matters: Craft, Design, & Fashion

By Catherine D. Ansporn

Dallas painter Charlotte Smith's acrylics on canvas and panel operate in the realm of trans-dimensional. Her built-up blobs of bulbous pigment or tentacle accretions of color push painting into the kingdom of sculpture. Biomorphism and futurism reign in works with a Crayola box-palette that conjure dizzying galactic and aquatic associations, such as a psychedelic coral reef or a pulsating nebula. The seemingly fragile forms are, in reality, rubbery to the touch and as hardy as the sea life that they often resemble.

More restrained pieces place the artist's delicate stacks at the edge of panels, on small shelves, or on vertical display, such as *Mint Popsicles* (2009) – works which, when viewed horizontally, evoke landscape associations. The blush-hued nipple shapes of *Strange Terrain* (2006) sprout from a wood panel that shares the same vaporous shade, while *Stratification* (2009) introduces a mid-century palette of aqua and earthy brown in strands of pigment interrupted by pearl-shaped pops of paint to suggest beaded necklaces.

Smith also takes a walk on the wild side with riotously explosive paintings. The lush, encrusted surface of *Aqualicious* (2009) is like a piece of jewelry a mermaid might wear, while the dramatic black, white, and gray swirling vortexes of *Moon Pie* (2009) and *Milky Way* (2008) transport the viewer to a galaxy far, far away. Other offerings move from the cosmic to the microscopic via meditative close-ups of amoebic forms (*Candy Land* 2009). Smith came to art-making midlife. While caring for her ailing mother, she filled hospital visits with painting, which prompted her to return to college and earn her MFA (1999, University of North Texas, Denton). She also drew inspiration from her mother—who, though not a practicing artist, approached life creatively through such pursuits as studying flower arranging while the family lived in Japan during Smith's childhood.

In graduate school, Smith experimented with suspended threads bearing what

she calls “raindrops of gesso and gloss.” She eliminated the threads in 2003 to probe how far she could go with strata of color. The artist acknowledges a craft component to her “purposefully obsessive” paintings. “I like the comparison,” she says, “because I think craft is important.” Her inspiration connects her to Seurat and Signac. “Paint drops stack up and form complex piles and rhythms...These pieces are a new and strange form of abstract pointillism.”