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KEVIN WINGATE AT ACUNA-HANSEN GALLERY

Los Angeles-based painter Kevin Wingate upsets a lot of people--even those who claim to be fans of his work--with his visceral, roughly hewn and literally earthy mixed-media paintings. Both large- and small scaled operations of his curious approach to image-building result in unlikely shape-shifting between pure abstractions, pock-marked landscapes and huddled, leering figures. His palette consists mainly of variations on the warm, melted-chocolate brown that results from mixing every other color together and Wingate's lexicon of gestures runs the gamut from clumpy impasto to feathery wistfulness. He seems, in reference to content, to adhere to Kandinsky's pre-Modern conviction that spiritual enlightenment was reachable through hyper-stimulation and visual simultaneity. *Stinky Meat and Sweet Eyes* (all works 2008) resembles nothing so much as a great fuzzy monster peering over a pile of rocks, a pair of eyes peering out from under its mass of thorny fuzz, the color of an oil slick.

Purple Metallic Cabbage is one of the most anthropomorphic, with its centrality of crusty "fur" and gaping mouth arrange for all the world like Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Children* and shoveling Fluffer-Nutter into his mouth with both hands, wild hair flying, eyes ripe with appetite, tufts of atmospheric disturbance rising all around in a particular halo. *The Valley Kills my Reception*, on the other hand, is the best example of how the artist manipulates the illusion of space through white areas; in fact, Wingate starts each painting by working the negative spaces, in a marked example of his practical habit of making the "wrong" choices--or shall we say, choosing the road less traveled.

The most conventionally pretty of the bunch, *Rubber Banded Bushbels* (2008) shows off the optical effect of painting on aluminum versus wood, its more dynamic refraction of light through pigment reinforced by the use of exuberant colors. A foreground cluster of flyaway vertical strokes break the suspension of planar disbelief, abstracting rather than repelling the gaze and giving the eyes, despite the reedy geyser's silken surface, a place to rest. The soft focus of this single lyrical element contrast with the juicy articulation of the hulk that crouches behind its tall grasses. Despite its lumpen demeanor, this thing is rendered crisply, giving the complete impression of shifting, almost photographic focal planes--an effect in turn heightened as the pictorial space recedes behind it. At the back, an inverted "v," composed of wide, pale brush strokes, reads like the peak of a rooftop and caps the space behind the form and under its crook. This solidifies the idea of a space contained therein and infiltrated by golden light. In many ways, this single painting comprises



the several threads that variously run throughout the series. The mass as protagonist, for example, is earthen and muddied as in other compositions, but displays a pride of defined, hewn arabesques with gently elided edges and commingling pigments that both transcend and document the painter's progress. The here-and-there addition of a constrained passage or a single mark of artificial, even neon color, breaks with the dominance of near naturalism that otherwise approaches the simply dirty, reminding incredulous audiences and the otherwise affronted of his presence as deliberate creator.

--Shana Nys Dambrot

Kevin Wingate: *Jungle on My Wrist* closed in December at Acuna-Hansen Gallery, Los Angeles.