

MIMI LAUTER

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MARC SELWYN

by Leah Ollman

LOS ANGELES Despite her youth, Mimi Lauter, born in 1982 and having recently acquired an MFA from UC Irvine, creates semiabstract images that feel dense with age. This show featured 13 luminous and richly textured works on paper, free from the superficiality of pastiche and imbued with formal qualities that seem to resonate across cultures, styles and time periods.

The yellows of egg yolks, sunlight and wheat dominate in most of the six large (up to 10 feet wide) works. Teal, amber, garnet, violet, red clay and russet round out a palette that mixes earthen associations and sacred radiance. Lauter builds her surfaces with oil, pastels and colored pencil. Through layering, incising, rubbing, scraping and scratching, she infuses every square inch with intense vitality. Crusty patches border areas of soft fluidity; a velvety lushness prevails. From afar, the works have the bold opulence of tapestries; up close, they disclose a raw form of mark-making, pictographic but also ornamental. Passages of repeated patterns (scalloped lines, tiny dashes, stacked triangles) bring Klimt to mind.

The titles designate places (*Crane's Hut*), moments (*Swaddled Dawn*) and events (*Crane Proposes to Heron*), but narrative is suppressed in favor of an overall feeling of mythic enchantment, fueled by the work's sensual immediacy and immersive scale. The birds appear mostly as fragmented suggestions. Shelters are evoked through the interplay of light-soaked exteriors and shadowy interiors. Sequences of dark verticals shot through by a shaft of light read as forest or grove. Blossoms and fronds show up here and there.

The artist's seven notebook-size drawings echo the imagery and tactility of her larger pieces. The effect is less ravishing at reduced scale, but the smaller works have their own compressed energy and jewel-like intimacy. Lauter, based in Los Angeles, reaches deep into visual history to summon up diverse, earthy sources— from cave paintings to the Breton landscapes of Gauguin, Emile Bernard and Paul Sérusier—which inflect this work with stunning vibrancy and authenticity. There is something primal going on here, beneath the surface and on it.

Photo: Mimi Lauter: Crane Proposes to Heron, 2010, oil and soft pastel, colored pencil and oil on paper, 72 by 124 inches; at Marc Selwyn.

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