



*Charles Ritchie, "Midday Rain" (Gallery Neptune & Brown)*

ALL THE WORKS IN "CARTE BLANCHE," a diverse 10-artist show at Gallery Neptune & Brown, are on paper. But some of the most striking ones are of paper as well. Caleb Nussear uses diamond-shaped folds to add topographic interest to vivid multi-color fields rendered with colored pencil and pastel. Alexandra Chiou cuts hand-painted sheets of paper into feathery, nature-inspired shapes and assembles the pieces into spiraling organisms that certify such titles as "Emerge" and "Renewal." Both artists deftly use simple materials to evoke complex phenomena.

Among the other abstractionists are Erick Johnson, who places subtly striated, watery hued geometric shapes into cobblestone-like arrays; and Nick Lamia, whose freehand ink drawings contrast map-like sections with open -- or perhaps just uncharted -- spaces. Ben Tolman's crypto-architectural drawing playfully piles a baroque array of objects and abstract forms at the front of a space whose wall and ceiling are patterned with regular black squares. Typical of the elegance of linn meyers's style is her drawing of a large circle defined by tightly hand-drawn black lines on a dark gray field.

The selection includes work by three photographers, including Michael Dax laccone, who uses his camera to document panoramas of his land-art endeavors. Redeat Wondemu, who's known for portraits, offers a sextet of pastoral views and floral closeups, all made at Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens. Most atmospheric are two pictures from Soomin Ham's "Windows" series, whose evocation of the past is both metaphorical and literal: At the bottom of the multi-level montages are photos made by the artist's grandfather.

Not a photographer, but sometimes a photorealist, is Charles Ritchie, who contributes four drawing-paintings. These range from the mistily monochromatic "Midday Rain," made with pencil and watercolor, to the colorful but muted "Kitchen II," precisely rendered with pencil, ink, watercolor, and acrylic. Ritchie depicts domestic scenes with an attentiveness that transforms everyday into exceptional.