

VERDURE

YVETTE GELLIS





Sacred Spaces to Verdure

For some, the pandemic was a time for reflection. With the directive to stay at home, many people confronted isolation and had to redefine their connections to the outside world. Those living in Los Angeles were lucky. With good weather and ample sunshine year-round, nature was always within reach. Watching the moon or sun rise and set, the palm fronds blowing in the wind brought a constant joie de vivre. Painter Yvette Gellis, motivated and inspired by the beauty in nature, channeled these feelings to create the mural *Sacred Spaces*, which was installed outside along the 450-foot long fence that surrounds the Annenberg Community Beach House in Santa Monica. In this work, Gellis linked together twenty-six panels, consisting of digitized vinyl images, many over-painted by hand, to create an expressive panorama of the mountains and the sea that progresses from dawn to dusk. The work was meant to bring peace and joy to those who wandered by. It functions as a wonderful reminder to appreciate the beauty of one's surroundings, no matter what the state of the world.

In her exhibit *Verdure* (on view at LA Louver from LA Louver, September 14 - October 16, 2021), Gellis continued these explorations of nature and "*the interconnectedness of all people and all life.*" While the paintings that comprise *Sacred Spaces* depict the natural landscape true to form, the works in *Verdure* are obscure, vibrant and explosive. In Gellis' large-scale (84 x 84 inch) paintings, loosely rendered figures dance across bright surfaces and mingle with plant life as well as architectural fragments. *Verdant* (all works 2021) juxtaposes muscular interlocking figures with twisting vines atop a vivid pink background. For *Ascension*, Gellis intertwines four overlapping female figures filled with a mix of transparent washes and lines that simultaneously define foliage. Part atmosphere, part plant life, these figures dominate a cloud-filled sky that is positioned to create an upward diagonal, a metaphor for an ascending journey. In the hot pink space that



Yvette Gellis, *Sacred Spaces*, 450ft. Annenberg Center Beach House, Santa Monica California 2021

defines *Kudzu*, green-hued figures move forward as if trying to burst out of the confines of the picture plane. Fragments of a darker pink and green receding checkerboard pattern are collaged behind and in some cases become part of the figures. The inclusion of these carefully painted and collaged geometric, architectural details directs the viewer's eye deep into the painted space and while doing so, create a curious contrast with the figures.

The orange yellow ground in the painting *Verdure* is home to a small array of huddled, crouching figures. A seated female in the foreground holds her hand up over her face as the others look on. Her arm and hand transcend abstraction to become a more well-defined form. This gesture is one of yielding acceptance or submission and sadness, despite being surrounded by lush green vegetation. In each canvas, gestural figures inhabit brightly colored spaces that appear like fragments from a sci-fi world.

Gellis retreated within herself to examine what it meant to be alive in a crisis and emerged with this new body of work. While there are references to past series, specifically with the collaging of the checkerboard patterns, rather than be about place, these paintings are about people and emotions. They are filled with dancing muses who engage in playful tussles. Gellis and, in turn, her figures, have internalized the goings on of the last year and emerged from the pandemic to proclaim a new outlook on life.

-Jody Zellen
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