

Art and Cake, May 6, 2018

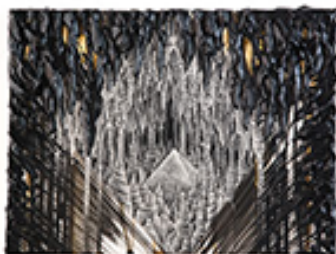
Kelly Berg

*Unknown Horizon*

Craig Krull Gallery

April 14 – May 26, 2018

By Jody Zellen



Kelly Berg's mixed media works occupy the territory between paintings and sculpture. She uses unconventional materials to build up surfaces that flow like lava, framing the delicately drawn centers of her compositions. Berg is interested in depicting all things geological, especially natural phenomena like stalagmites inside of caves, earthquakes and volcanoes in this show entitled *Unknown Horizon*. Her intensely detailed works hover between abstraction and representation. An intriguing aspect to Berg's practice is that she works both large and small. Sometimes installed salon-style on a single wall, the small works provide an entry point to her varied subject matter.

*Kilauea* (2017) is a 5 x 7 inch work comprised of mirror styrene, acrylic and ink on wood that references the active Hawaiian volcano. Gray concentric circles represent waves of lava emanating from a fiery pit. To emphasize the impact of an explosion, Berg has attached long pointed shards of mirror styrene painted with an intricate geometric pattern bursting from the top of the image. Between these shards and the painted wooden panel is a textured white foam edged with brilliant orange accents suggesting lines of fire spewing from the volcano. This fascinating work seems to tell a complete story. However, when seen in relation to the other images, it is just one of a series of natural disasters that have occupied her imagination. In this cluster, Berg presents other small works including *Midnight Mirage*, *Eruption* and *Golden Plume* (all 2017). In each piece, the center — a volcanic eruption, a subterranean cavern, a rupture or an electric array — is framed by a three-dimensional form that encapsulates the energy of the

event.

In her larger pieces, like the enigmatic, *Edge of the World*, (2018) plumes of orange smoke burst from a detailed representation of an erupting volcano where waterfalls of molten lava cascade toward the bottom of the work, flowing over the edges and framing it with mountainous folds of gold. In addition to volcanoes, Berg also depicts fissures in an imagined landscape. *Rift* (2016) is a large (7 foot high) acrylic painting on wood in which the land splits apart. She details the chasms created by this disruption as deep and dark. They branch out from a black volcanic mound at the top of the work, zig-zagging down the composition like arteries coming to rest toward the bottom of the painting where they converge with a pattern that resembles the lines on a contour map. This work is chilling as a representation of the earth coming apart.

While *Rift* is streamlined and graphic, *Architects of the Underground* (2016) is intricate and detailed. Here, Berg uses scratchboard— etching fine cross-hatched white lines into a dark surface, to depict a finite space covered with stalagmites and stalactites encircling a pyramid. The careful line work is set against thickly impastoed tones of blue, brown and black.

Berg's densely layered paintings suggest the passage of time. She internalizes the fears and threats associated with natural disasters and claustrophobic spaces, and uses her materials to metaphorically represent these dangers. The works are gritty, jagged and assertive, yet simultaneously suggest man's vulnerability with respect to nature. As Berg remarks, "I saw the formations of volcanic rock left from the lava flows, and was captivated by the sharp sculptural forms and how they seemed to represent the power of nature frozen in time. I wanted to make paintings that are strong and solid like rock, yet that expressed a sense of gesture and movement: something both fleeting and eternal at the same time, which is what I saw in the volcano." Berg is aware of the implicit contradictions in her endeavor but nonetheless strives to make paintings that describe the uncanny beauty of these dangerous and unpredictable natural forces.

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