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Nancy Monk & Robin Mitchell
From the Delicate To the Explosive

Craig Krull Gallery
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by Jody Zellen



Nancy Monk's small-scale paintings are quiet and subtle. She works with a minimal, and sometimes even a monochrome palette, creating abstract shapes that evoke people, animals, flowers and trees. The details of Monk's intricate handling of ink, fabric and paint coalesce in each work, becoming articulate representations. Lines and dots form circles, which in turn becomes plants and flowers, as in the delicate *leaning yellow tree* and *leaning tree* (both 2017). In this series, she works with a palette of yellows and grays. She layers her materials—ink, acrylic, wood and bits of fabric— onto canvas, creating a menagerie.

The majority of works are small, twelve by nine inches, (as the show's title suggests), and Monk is able to imbue each composition with wit and charm, evoking more than her minimal depictions present. For example, the darker yellow patches in *lemon tree* (2018) become lemons suspended within a geometric composition. Similarly, in *canary boots* (2018), Monk presents a child-like rendering of a baby bird with red "L-shaped" feet. Monk's landscapes divide the composition horizontally, creating bands of muted colors to represent land and sky. Sometimes the sky is dotted with ovals (clouds) or the land is bisected by stick figure-shaped trees. Monk works with a purposefully limited vocabulary of shapes and colors. She blurs the

lines between figure and ground, as well as abstraction and representation, to create intimate paintings that explore the complexity of simplicity.

While Nancy Monk's minimal representations fill the front galleries, **Robin Mitchell's** colorful abstractions circle the larger back gallery space. Her works are swirls of intersecting colors created through the obsessive process of overlapping brush strokes again and again in order to fill the paper or canvas in an array of floral-like designs. The paintings have the aura of complex mandalas, futuristic flowers and celebratory explosions of color. Each labor-intensive work is built up with successive layers of paint. Mitchell plays with different opacities and color relationships, creating dense compositions that invite viewers to visually burrow below the surface.

The gouache on paper and oil on canvas paintings include the seductive ***Geiger Counter*** (2017), a 55 x 45-inch canvas where bright loops of orange, yellow and blue emanate from an orange-toned center against a more somber background of deep reds and greens. When broken down, the highly structured composition becomes a series of concentric circles made from dotted lines in different colors and opacities. These lines intersect arrays of petal-like shapes that meet in the center of the painting. The kaleidoscopic works are infused with a sense of movement and seem to pulsate. Although the methodology might be the same, each work is a unique exploration of the relationship between color and line.

In ***Gyroscope*** (2107), circles in a range of tones that fluctuate between pink and ochre are juxtaposed with loops of cyan and orange, whereas in the large painting ***Observatory*** (2018), the concentric shapes oscillate between light and dark. It is easy to get lost in Mitchell's seductive and awe-inspiring works and indulge in floating between the layers and dotted lines, allowing the eye to jump from ring to ring as if on an open-ended journey.

It is a treat to view Nancy Monk's and Robin Mitchell's works together. They are both accomplished painters with long careers whose practices have remained true to their idiosyncratic aesthetics while simultaneously evolving to greater levels of complexity. Both artists explore the relationship between color and space, abstraction and representation, and while Monk's work is minimal and Mitchell's maximal, there is an intriguing dialogue about layering, depth, line and form that occurs when these works are viewed in relation to one another.

<http://artnowla.com/2018/03/21/nancy-monk-robin-mitchell>