

## NANCY MONK

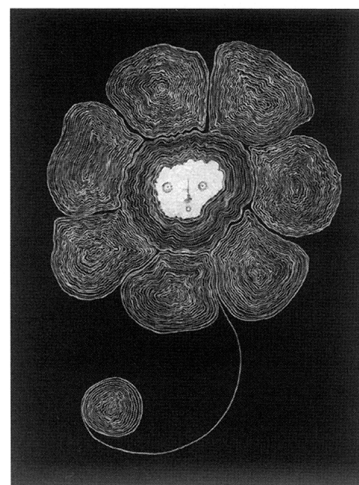
(Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica) Nancy Monk's current paintings, presented under the title "Maybe," can't help but bring to mind the work of Paul Klee, Joan Miro and Alexander Calder, whose delightful pieces are full of lyrical whimsy. Although Monk's palette is purposely limited (she shies away from the bright colors of these antecedents in favor of a more muted palette drawn from the natural landscape) her juxtaposition of lines, shapes and images allude to the wonders of nature. Monk speaks about the intuitive aspects of her process, that one thing often leads to another within a single work and

across a series. She is interested in the relationships between shapes and surfaces, together with the surprises that occur when mediums are combined — for example ink and gesso.

Many of Monk's works begin with a photograph. It serves as a base over which she applies paint, separating the foreground from the background or outlining specific shapes, which in turn become a fresh point of departure. In "e tee" Monk collages a small photograph of a brass elephant she happened on in a second-hand store to the surface of a darkly painted canvas. The elephant appears to be on what Monk calls "a horizon line or a tight-rope." Emerging from the elephant's back and filling the top half of the composition is a filigreed tree comprised of delicate interlocking concentric circles made from thousands of dabs of gold ink. Each of the paintings in the "Brass" series begins with an altered object whose image is placed atop a horizontal line that bisects the canvas. From these objects sprouts a tree-like mandala. Each tree, like the object from which it grows, is a unique exploration of texture and form that has been inspired by the original object. "W tree" begins with a Christmas ornament — a brass Magi— whose halo is repeated to form the tree-like mandala above the figure.

It is easy to see human features in Monk's depiction of the natural world. Her personification of trees and flowers imbues them with both emotion and charm. "Nordic flower" is a small doodle-like painting on linen (12 x 9 inches) whose snowy-white pistil forms a face that appears to be surrounded by fur. The large oval shaped form in "tweed tree" contains numerous all-seeing eyes, whereas the geometric forms that become a face in "blinker" allude to the opening and closing of a blinking eye.

Monk's works have a childlike simplicity created through the reduction of the observable world into essential elements. Yet there is nothing simple about their construction or her process. In her own words, "Using an additive and subtractive process, I paint over things to make an atmospheric ground ... I use this atmospheric ground as a created surface on which to expose new lines and shapes. By painting out the nega-



Nancy Monk, "nordic flower," 2015, ink on linen, 12 x 9".

tive space, I make lines. By painting over the negative space, a new positive is formed. For me, it is as if the image is already there and I am recreating it." While at first glance there is a similarity in the form and format of Monk's painted flowers and trees, each one has a distinctive personality expressed through variations in color, pattern and pose on the page. Some are bombastic like "heat tree" and "cornflower," while others like "grid flower" are more subdued and subtle.

The "Maybe" of this exhibition's title references a place between "yes" and "no" that is filled with possibilities. "Maybe" implies ambiguity and uncertainty. However, when Monk puts paint on canvas there is a confidence to her gestures and a certainty that comes from years of experience that one can implicitly trust one's intuition in the creation of complex and evocative works of art that are simultaneously and compellingly simple.

Jody Zellen