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# Weekend

47

## A Surface Look At Washington And Miami Beach

By MARK JENKINS  
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**F**OR MILLENNIA, all paintings looked flat. Gradually, artists developed shading, perspective and modeling to give the illusion of depth. After photography stole painting's documentary thunder, however, flatness returned in a big way. For some advocates of abstraction, using paint to create the impression of depth was nothing less than heresy.

At "Reflections on Architecture," Joey P. Manlapaz's current show at the American Institute of Architects Headquarters Gallery, the split between pure surface and illusionist depth is not so contentious. If you want deep, stay on the first floor; if you prefer flat, go upstairs.

Manlapaz, a Philippines native and longtime Washingtonian, is technically not an abstract painter. The 24 works in this show, most of them oil on linen, depict architectural facades and details from two places: Washington and Miami Beach. But her style of painting would not be possible without abstraction and its aesthetic fallout, notably "photorealist" Richard Estes's glossy, hard-edged cityscapes. Like Estes, Manlapaz paints a world we know from photographs, although her style is looser and more painterly.

Four of the pieces are works on paper from 1992 and '93 that depict local storefronts. These smaller paintings are geographically linked to the eight larger, more recent depictions of the District, but are stylistically distinct.

Their colors are brighter, their focal planes are flatter and they frequently have human figures in the foreground. The bigger Washington paintings, done from 2001 to 2003, are burnished and multilayered, often depicting a building's context—both architectural and human—in reflective surfaces or through glass. While the works on paper seem more concerned with subject matter than style, the crux of the larger Washington pictures is reflectiveness itself. The artist conjures depth and shimmer with both

composition and technique.

Manlapaz depicts levels of imagery in windows, mirrors and other shiny surfaces, and applies several layers of glaze under and over the darker shades of paint. In pieces such as "Primp Then Play" and "Flag Day," she highlights the appearance of depth by placing objects and figures in the middle plane—palpable, yet clearly under glass. Unlike many photorealists, she doesn't depict scenes only from outside. Sometimes her vantage point is from an interior, facing the street, gazing through windows and doors. (In "Billie," the viewpoint seems to be from inside a bus.) The effect is not only fascinating in a pictorial sense, these paintings are also alive with a sense of place.

Manlapaz's formal interest in architectural surfaces dominates the Miami Beach paintings, which were made from 1999 to 2003. These are different in part because South Beach architecture is different: streamlined, orderly and painted in such sherbet colors as lime, raspberry and pale orange—as well as lots of aqua, of course, to represent the ocean that's never seen in these pictures. (The most vivid hue is the blue of the sky.) Derived from industrial design—notably steamships—the buildings' lines are often curvilinear but usually geometric, without the complex, nature-inspired ornamentation of Victorian and art nouveau styles. Manlapaz found the one exception to this so striking that she named her painting of it "Curlycue."

Taking her lead from the structures' simple shapes and planes of sunny color, the artist made these paintings flatter and more abstract than the Washington ones. They focus tightly on portions of buildings, emphasizing the regular patterns of shadows, stripes, windows—the latter often round, modeled on ship portholes. These pictures have no people in them, few dark colors and—unlike the Washington paintings, which offer a riot of signage—only a handful of words. Many of them are named simply after colors: "Aqua-Berry," "Lemon-Lime"



*Tattoo Bazaar, 2001*  
(from *Reflections Series*)

PHOTOS COURTESY JOEY P. MANLAPAZ



Joey P. Manlapaz's "Tattoo Bazaar," above, and "Curlycue" are part of "Reflections on Architecture," at the American Institute of Architects Headquarters Gallery.

or "Salmon Squares" (for its pink window frames).

The largest of the Miami Beach paintings is "Geodesic: A Composite," a title that suggests the picture combines architectural details from several buildings. That would be in the spirit of these works, none of which is primarily a representation of a particular structure. (For that, we have photography.) In a way, the South Beach images are color-field paintings.

Look closely and you'll see that the paint is applied in swirling patterns, which are then given a final gloss with a layer of translucent

white. Like a doctrinaire abstract expressionist, Manlapaz makes paintings that celebrate pigment itself, but then wraps them in several layers of design and documentation.

In her notes to the exhibition, Manlapaz reveals her unhappiness with the destruction of Washington's older buildings, and the unsatisfying "solution" of erecting new structures behind thin historic facades. By contrast, she notes, Miami Beach based its renaissance on architectural preservation and restoration. This comparison is in-

exact, since the development pressures are quite different in downtown Washington and South Beach, which only became fashionable again in the '80s after a long slide. And, although Washington did enthusiastically destroy the built heritage of its downtown, it does have districts where historic structures still dominate.

Interestingly, the show doesn't include any views of architecturally homogeneous Georgetown or Capitol Hill. Locally at least, Manlapaz seems drawn not to architectural continuity but to the juxtaposition and complexity she finds in neighborhoods such as Adams Morgan, Shaw and downtown.

In her Miami Beach pictures, Manlapaz's multilayered style is a purely formal accomplishment. In the Washington ones, it's much more.

**REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE** — Through Aug. 1 at the American Institute of Architects Headquarters Gallery, 1735 New York Ave. NW. 202-626-7300.

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# On Exhibit