



Samantha Fields: *Storm Anvil over the Great Plains (Nebraska)*, 2007, acrylic on canvas on panel, 42 by 36 inches; at Kim Light/LightBox.

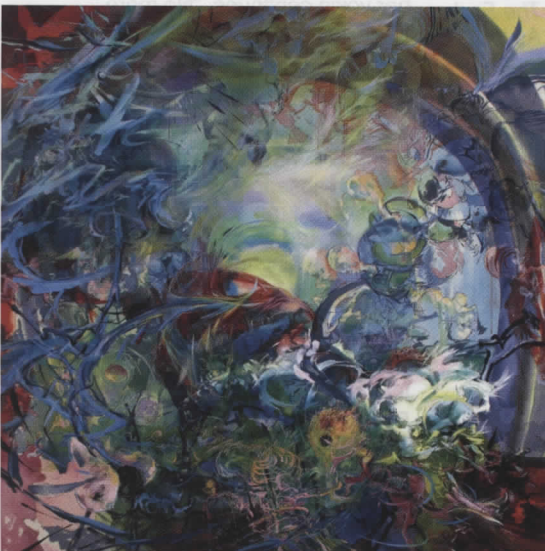
LOS ANGELES

Samantha Fields at Kim Light/LightBox

Environmental drama of Shakespearean proportions is the best way to describe the unrestrained atmospheric landscapes that constituted Samantha Fields's major solo exhibition, "This Land." The nine medium-size airbrushed canvases (all 2006 or '07) are synthesized compositions collaged from photographs she took chasing storm cells across the U.S. Fields contemplates the darkest possible outcomes of man's impact on nature and the ever-present possibility of natural and manmade apocalyptic intrusions—acid rain, global warming, nuclear winters, wildfires, twisters, earthquakes, etc.

The artist's previous works

Iva Gueorguieva: *The Blue Rider*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 90 inches square; at Carl Berg.



examined molecular patterns, genetically engineered flora and curiously rodentlike fauna, and the ascent of early man as a dominant force on earth—hairy bipeds brandishing weapons. In spite of her disaster-based mantras and eco-political subtexts, Fields never loses sight of an esthetic informed by the sublime. Her sophisticated, historically grounded gaze, referencing artists as diverse as Bosch and Ross Bleckner, Goya and Beverly Fishman, is as concerned with formal issues as with social consciousness. Now that her work is mostly devoid of people or manmade products, displacement and reclamation are the

key metaphors. *Storm Anvil over the Great Plains (Nebraska)* is in the tradition of Leonardo's deluge drawings and Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow*. Her use of light and shadow further exaggerates the viewer's perception of movement and pictorial depth, as the storm moves across the canvas—wild cumulonimbus clouds spread their ominous wings over hundreds of miles of heartland as a hopeful, luminous blue sky is sucked into a gargantuan black hole tearing through the lower right quadrant.

Wilderness at Twilight (Yellowstone), the largest of the new paintings, suggests a post-nuclear scenario. Thick, rusty clouds bear down heavily on a thin undulating band of parched earth while simultaneously blotting out life-giving sun. The barely visible remains of a defoliated forest

stand tall and populate the brooding terrain as if waiting for something other than their apparent destiny.

Fields's pictorial solutions are never simple. She builds tension by juxtaposing familiar and idealized iconography with psychologically charged allusions, and she skillfully employs color theory, hypernarrative and the inherent grandeur of the Western American landscape.

—Joe Lewis

Iva Gueorguieva at Carl Berg

There is a lot to like about the expansive, turbulent canvases of Iva Gueorguieva, from their varied and inventive brushwork to their radiant, Romantic palette to the stealthy presence of ghostly, humanoid creatures she picks out of the morass. In her second solo show at this space, the Bulgarian-born artist, who studied with Dona Nelson at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, structures the more successful of her landscape-like spaces around large, readily legible subdivisions of the picture plane, grounding her churning, overwrought vistas in familiar compositional conventions.

At roughly 8 by 18 feet, *Gyre* (all paintings acrylic on canvas, 2007) devours the viewer by virtue not only of its size but its colors, wildly divergent in both value and hue, and its skittish but purposeful touch. A swath of blue and green splinters the painting, pushing hot colors to the edges. It is a spiraling torrent that might represent wind or water, and it sucks the viewer into a vortex of fire and ice. The exhibition's title, "Gyre Carling," refers to a supernatural being in Celtic lore, the Queen of the Witches, who controls the weather and is prone to shape-shifting. Let's say that Gueorguieva does not shy away from melodrama.

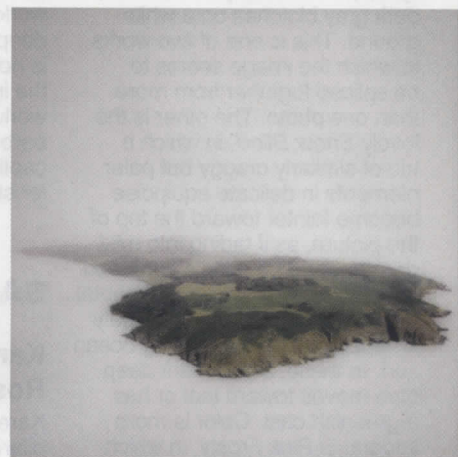
The nature of the ground varies. In *Thick as Thieves*, a clamoring, heaving heaven looms above the limpidly glowing horizon, set low in the frame; mediating between the two is a charred-looking, demonic head sprouting antlers or branches. The paint's crisp delivery, on a plain gesso ground, differs greatly in effect from *The Blue Rider*, which is painted on raw canvas into which the initial application of paint soaks. The soft-focus glowing stain of pale blue and yellow-green implies an orb of distant, heavenly light that frames and contains the mad flurry of strokes whirling through the foreground. An absorbent gesso ground lends a pallid, watery look to another painting, *These are Places where nothing is wrong but there is Something wrong*; lacking a strong structure, however, its 6-by-9-foot expanse is claustrophobically dense and chromatically flat.

In a selection of works on paper, *Sleepy Genes* is a standout. At 3 feet across, it is intimate com-

pared to the canvases, but it is similarly full to bursting and also relies on the contrast of broad, sweeping application and finer drawing. Sprightly hues of rose, violet and green gouache dominate; blackish ink provides ballast. The interplay of line and shape animating the paintings is here further complicated by the tactility of a collaged surface and by creeping figurative references.

Gueorguieva's work recalls the swirling, elastic space and dissolving forms of Futurism, the bombast of the high Baroque and the grand scale of Hudson River School painters like Bierstadt and Church. Julie Mehretu and Cecily Brown are compositional cousins. But Gueorguieva is no *pasticheuse*; she is well on her way to making this canny blend of sources and enthusiasms her own.

—Stephen Maine



Sean Higgins: *Terraform*, 2007, inkjet print transfer and acrylic on Plexiglas, 36 inches square; at sixspace.

CULVER CITY

Sean Higgins at sixspace

A University of Pennsylvania graduate making his solo debut, Sean Higgins crafts photo-based hybrids that yield appealing if deliberately vague depictions of water-bound land masses. Most of the works shown at sixspace are square, ranging from 2 to 5 feet on a side. Higgins shot some of the source photos and appropriated others; whether verdant and sylvan or barren and desolate, all the islands are seen from elevated vantage points that emphasize their isolation. Each photo is enlarged and transferred to the back of a sheet of Plexiglas. The front side is then carefully sanded