



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

to evoke the obfuscating effect of light-diffusing haze. This mediation of the image softens its focus, generalizes its forms and, in the most intriguing works, disguises scale.

In *Magic Number* (all works 2007), seven jagged rocks poking out of the sea read primarily as beautiful shapes: crinkled, dark gray blotches on a white ground. This is one of two works in which the image seems to be spliced together from more than one photo. The other is the lovely *Snow Blind*, in which a trio of similarly craggy but paler elements in delicate equipoise become fainter toward the top of the picture, as if fading into mist or memory. The artist's approach to color is cautiously experimental in three pieces based on closely cropped photos of crashing ocean surf. In these, a dominant deep blue moves toward teal or has a greenish cast. Color is more integral in *Pink Frosty*, in which an arching formation of eroded rock, beyond which the ocean's distant horizon can be glimpsed, is filtered through pink Plexiglas.

Other works are merely competent. *Valhalla* and the smaller *Terraform* are derived from wide-angle views of pastoral isles.

Teamed with saturated, arcadian greens, the lofty perspective recalls the mythic paradise promised by travel advertisements. The show's nuclear-physics-derived title, "The Island of Relative Stability," follows a vogue for pseudoscientific references but offers both too much and too little. Further sapping the works' strength is the absence of a deeply personal take. The viewer is not sure how Higgins feels about the images he uses. As it is, the work is a bit too easy to like, not barbed or confounding enough to captivate. But one senses that riskier stuff is within this artist's grasp.

—Stephen Maine

## SANTA MONICA

### Karen Carson at Rosamund Felsen

Karen Carson's awesome, joyous, hilarious paintings of Pegasus-filled skies are virtuosic testaments to her medium and the culmination of several bodies of work made since she began spending part of each year in Big Timber, Mont. After series devoted to waterfalls, fires and windstorms, the L.A. painter has turned to invisible forces that are just as can-