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Art in America

David Mann at McKenzie

By Jonathan Goodman
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David Mann's exquisitely rendered works seem to represent gravity-defying phenomena that could be unfolding on a galactic or molecular level. The 10 glowing canvases in his third show at McKenzie feature flexible white loops and ellipses that look as if they were suspended in space or liquid. They are readable as cosmic formations viewed through a telescope or as cells seen through a microscope. Such extremes of scale are enhanced by the dimensions of the paintings, which range from 8 by 10 inches to 72 by 78. Mann's intent seems more poetic than analytical, as the acrylic-and-oil canvases convey a richness of feeling that acknowledges historical abstraction.



David Mann, *For Us*, 2007, Acrylic and oil on canvas on board

Mann's method is highly idiosyncratic: rather than using a brush, he sprays, pours and scatters drops of pigment, using squeegees to effect the light-edged rings that appear against darkened grounds. In *Accord* (all paintings 2007), one of the larger works, loops of bluish white form two concentric rings. The center of the configuration seems to be moving

back and down from these loose halos, and consists of small bright dots, again of bluish white, encircled by a ring of light. The intense radiance of the forms is heightened by the black ground, which contributes to the impression that the painting is meant to approximate the dark void of deep space. Mann maintains a tight hand, so that the composition never feels limitless or verges out of control.

Mann constructs another ecstatic space in *For Us*, where ribbons of gold and white activate a dark field in the upper two-thirds of the painting. The lower third is occupied by a gleaming, golden semicircle, into which smaller luminous rings seem to be falling. Circles and dots of more muted light punctuate the darkness above. The viewer looks into an area of radiance, whose seeming source, positioned at the bottom of the composition, is completely white. In *Little Texas Medicine*, where the additional

use of alkyd has yielded a surface that seems varnished, pale “blooms” are scattered across a large, amorphous black mass, which is itself bordered by more white floral forms. Like the rest of the show, *Little Texas Medicine* demonstrates that Mann’s mastery of this idiom, which he has been developing since 2001, has not diminished the subjectivity that animates his vision throughout. —Jonathan Goodman