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## 'Monumental' @ JayJay

Posted on 06 April 2018.



Ian Harvey, "No. 164," 2017, mixed media on mulberry paper, 75 x 114 inches  
by **David M. Roth**

*Monumental* is easily the best group exhibition I've seen all year. It has weak spots to be sure, but my only real reservation concerns the title. Where the word monumental once referred to things that dwarfed human presence — things like Mount Rushmore and the Giza pyramids — it's now routinely used to describe any work of art too big to fit over the sofa. I have theories about how and why, but that's another story.

The thing to know about *Monumental* is that it features a handful of outstanding works that qualify it as a must-see exhibition. In all, 21 painters and sculptors are represented. If there's a trait uniting them it's a commitment to "finding" compositions in the process of creating them. The other thing to consider as you move through the exhibition is the possibility that the old idea of monumentality may giving way to something more encompassing, something less determined by physical scale than by material inventions that transform and expand our thinking.

Here are some highlights:



Koo Kyung Sook, (Detail) "Markings 17-6," 2017, total size 77 x 158"

**Ian Harvey** makes paintings that operate at the far edge of coherence. *No. 164*, a triptych on paper, alludes to identifiable things: animals, furniture, boxes and other objects. But their identity as such is provisional. They spin out centrifugally from crown-shaped rings at the center and float like remnants of a dream. Dabs of metallic paint cast a talismanic aura. **Koo Kyung Sook**, his Korea-born wife and frequent collaborator, submits what is the highlight of the exhibition: *Markings 17-6*, a wall-length trio of woodcut prints, merged to form a unified whole. Her process begins with carved woodblocks into which the aforementioned prints are pounded and carved, after having first been covered with 10 to 12 layers of wet mulberry paper. Extracted from their molds in the manner of waffles, the resulting shapes leap out in topographic relief, resembling icebergs or islands seen from the sky.

**Joan Moment**, the second Northern California woman to be awarded a one-person show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, offers a profusely detailed painting called *Galaxy XII*: a sea of radiant blue flecked by points of white light – thousands of them. The fluid ground on which



Joan Moment, "Galaxy XII," 2016-18, acrylic on canvas, 96 x 72 inches

those dots appear exemplifies what the LA critic Peter Frank called "Flow Painting." He coined the term to describe a group of artists who allow and actively encourage thin paint to move across painting surfaces in the manner of natural processes, i.e. floods, lava flows. Moment's 6 x 8-foot excursion into deep space is a potent evocation of those forces, a fusion of earth, sky and cosmic yearning.

**Robin Hill** offers a multi-part (106 x 94-inch) cyanotype whose central image is a vastly magnified snowflake. She's not the first to approach this subject; that honor goes to William Bentley who first documented the unique, geometric shapes of snowflakes in 1885. Hill's presentation, however, reveals a deeper, almost fractal-like substructure that calls to mind skyscrapers, which is not an association you'd make if the image weren't magnified to such a degree. So while the print is not, strictly speaking, monumental, the exponentially larger scale at which she depicts the subject qualifies it as such.





Robin Hill, "Snowflake No. 2," 2011, cyanotype on paper, 106 x 94 inches

**Roger Berry's** 8 x 12-foot sculpture, *Unfurl*, probes infinity with interlocked stainless steel circles that appear to have no beginning or end; the piece is composed of welded circular segments whose seams are sanded smooth. It represents the latest chapter in a long career that up until a few years ago was dominated by earthier-looking corten steel sculptures set in public places. Were this one to show up on a hillside near you it would be an event worth celebrating. **Rick Siggins'** untitled mandala-shaped painting, built from 150 triangular canvases of varying sizes, also lays claim to the infinite using the language of geometric abstraction and Op. Lines formed by the intersecting canvases shoot out in all directions, suggesting a geometry text's worth of shapes, while painted lines, laid down on each segment in what seem like identical colors and intervals, foster the appearance of a dimensional surface, which turns out to be an illusion. Whether there's substance behind the sizzle in this work I can't yet say. It definitely merits a long look.

**Jeff Mayry**, a recent graduate of UC Davis' MFA program, exhibits a canny reformulation of Terry Winters, attaching to his submission, the obscure title, *Bluest Gills Grayest Eyes*. It consists of loosely painted shapes claustrophobically aligned and stacked, making for an impenetrable jumble. Closer inspection reveals hints of urban architecture that, perplexingly, both invite and resist focus. That well-engineered enigma earns Mayry a spot on my artists-to-watch list.



Roger Berry, "Unfurl," 2018, stainless steel, 8 x 12 4 feet; background right Mark Emerson, "Elvas Excursion," 2018, polymer on canvas, 84 x 108 inches

**Trent Burkett's** *Tilt*, a helter-skelter arrangement of wood scraps mounted on two thick joists forming a giant L, calls to mind Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau*, (1933), the room-sized masterpiece that has long inspired installation artists. Burkett's effort, at a considerably smaller scale, has the look and feel of a reconstructed shipwreck with two "faces," one painted white, the other left raw. The effect is of two very different pieces occupying the same physical space, each holding forth with equal authority. Nested high on a nearby support beam is **Robert Orbal's** *Crystalline Jester*. It's a cluster of shellacked cardboard boxes, conjoined to look like a mutant organism; it extends the artist's probe into what my colleague Mikko Lautamo called the "baffling conspiracy between matter and energy that we still lack the tools to explain or comprehend."

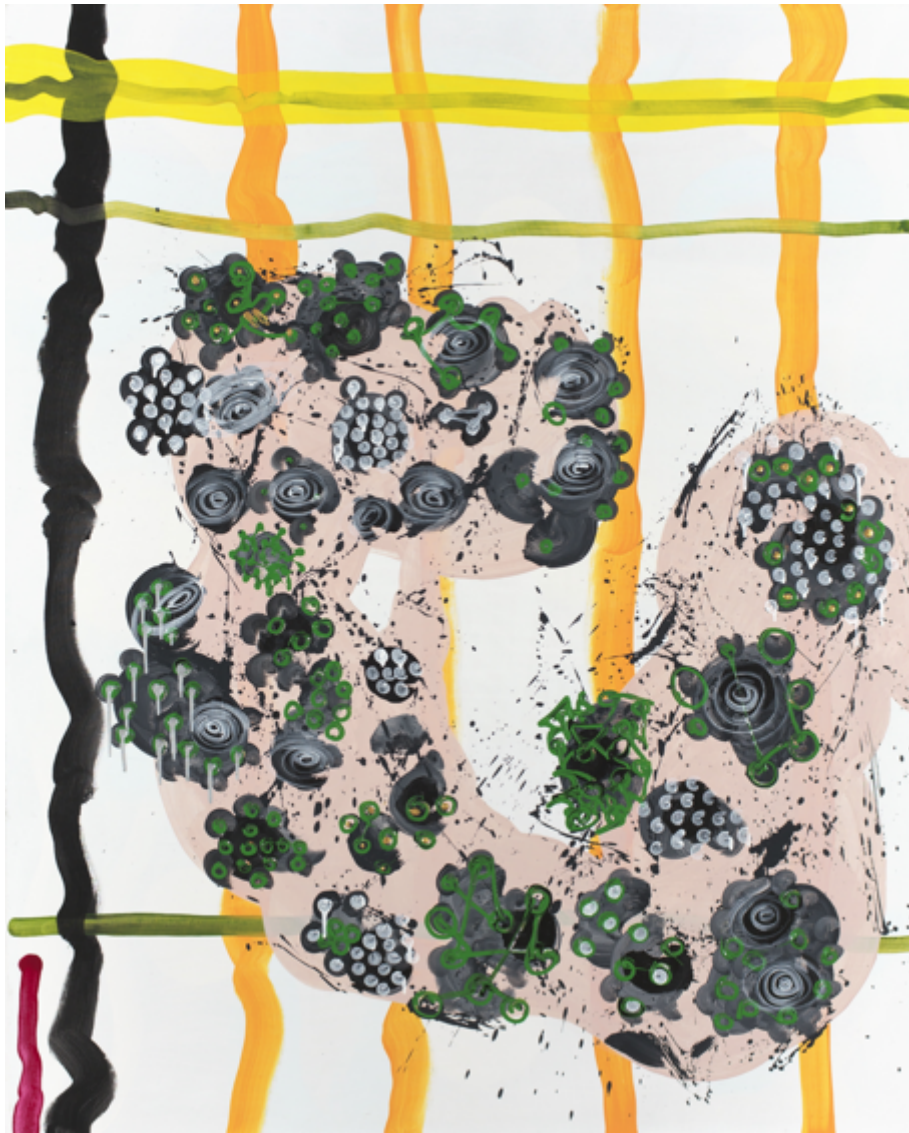


Trent Burkett, "Tilt," 2015, marble, wood, paint, 96 x 108 x 18 inches

**Mike Stevens'** wall installation, *Leo's Confession*, details the artist's obsession with the dissolution of the American Dream, the elevator pitch for which might go: Norman Rockwell meets Truman Capote. The piece consists of seven wood slabs shaped like snarling faces. Onto these the artist superimposes images, ranging from kitschy scenes of picket-fence Americana to Dutch genre painting to a crude rendition of *The Last Supper*. They encircle the sleepwalking visage of Howdy-Doody as he walks a plank, his arms outstretched in a hypnotic trance. The piece, made in 2004, encapsulates well our current political malaise, although not by design. Stevens has been making work of this sort for years, the roots of which trace to his Catholic school upbringing and the Vietnam War, both of which darkened his worldview.

**Peter Wayne Lewis**, a Jamaica-born artist who divides his time between a teaching post in Boston, a home in South Orange, N.J. and a part-time presence in Beijing, lays out expressions of unalloyed joy. His works are, at root, performances: one-take events that go out into the world as-is, like the Blue Note recordings of yore he so admires. Many artists speak about the influence of jazz; Lewis embodies it. You feel it in the calligraphic brushwork pirouetting across his surfaces, the pauses he allows for quick, flowery wrist gestures, and the squiggly lines he tears off to inflect yawning white spaces. It's his way of actively marking time, making visual the rhythms inside his head. *Ripples in Time*, the work on display, represents as well as any I've seen, his governing ethos.





Peter Wayne Lewis, "Ripples in Time," 2010, acrylic on linen, 85 x 72 inches

**Mary Warner's**, *Napa Revisited*, a picture of a towering eucalyptus tree, operates along similar principles. Her work celebrates the abundance of nature, skirting the now-fashionable view, that digital culture has rendered it null and void. The precise, quasi-realistic character of Warner's painting of that tree, in Morandi-like shades of gray tinted with amber-colored morning light, makes it appear both palpably real and simultaneously unattainable, the latter owing to the picture's narrow borders. They crop the top and the sides, injecting mild distortion, thereby bending the two conjoined trunks ever so slightly backwards. The painting is only 84 inches tall, but her treatment makes it appear far taller: proof that monumentality can be achieved in ways other than just sheer size.



Mary Warner, "Napa Revisited," 2018, oil on linen, 84 x 36 inches

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*"Monumental" @ [JayJay](#) through April 28, 2018. Other artists included are: Mark Emerson, Linda Day, Mark Eanes, Stephen Giannetti, Michaele LeCompte, Angela Willits, Michael Sarich, Anne Gregory and Kevin Keul.*

**About the author:**

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**About David Roth**

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**Response to "Monumental' @ JayJay"**



1. **Mary Warner** says:

[April 20, 2018 at 4:16 PM](#)



This is the best review of an installation of work, I have read in quite some time. There is a simple no frills elegance about the way it is put together. It begins with what we think of as “Monumental” and finishes with the way something can be experienced as monumental, regardless of it’s size.

In between the beginning and the end, David Roth gives a satisfying take on twelve of the pieces in the show, often including an image. What sets this apart from many reviews of group shows is that he really looks at each piece on it’s own terms and gives them a clear and thoughtful read. I was at the opening of this show and enjoyed it. After reading the review, I was compelled to return and view the works again in private,so as to see them.