

Where the heart is

Blau focuses on home—as the roofs are caving in

Susanne Forestieri

Thu, Jan 15, 2009 (midnight)



Elizabeth Blau's "For Closure," oil and acrylic on canvas.

The American dream of owning one's own home has turned into a nightmare, especially in Las Vegas, the nation's foreclosure capital. The good news is that nightmares can inspire artists. (Think Goya.) This creative alchemy is still something of a mystery, but we know it requires skill and imagination to turn ideas and feelings into visual images.

Has a young artist like Elizabeth Blau been able to transform the merely topical into lasting art? The Las Vegas native's latest exhibition is composed of small mixed-media works on drafting film and larger oil and acrylics on linen and canvas. Although the small and large works are stylistically different, they all contain some kind of abode as a central element. The smaller works feature precise architectural renderings of homes overlaid with washes of pastel color, making them almost invisible in what could be a metaphor for the foreclosure debacle (homes disappear in the blink of an eye). But art is complex, and Blau's subtle, sometimes small touches signal more is actually going on.

The Details

[Elizabeth Blau's Mentalist and Medium>](#)

Through February 13
 Wednesday-Saturday, noon-4 p.m. (and by appointment)
 The Fallout Gallery
 1551 S. Commerce St., 269-3111.

In terms of line and the application of color, these small works remind me of Charles Demuth's watercolors of factories. He was an early 20th-century American artist inspired by modern technology, who painted with an optimism and confidence difficult to sustain in our disillusioned age. There was plenty of sleaze and greed in Demuth's time; but there was also a belief that technology would make the world a better place—a belief we no longer unequivocally accept. I think Blau's feminine addition of soft homey elements, such as daintily painted flower prints, to her otherwise hard geometric compositions reflects that ambivalence.

Her larger works, "Mansion 1" and "Mansion 2," are almost identical views of an early Georgian mansion that could be the White House. That impression is reinforced by the American flags in the foreground. But something seems amiss. Streaks of garish red stain the raw linen where you expect to see blue sky and billowing white clouds. I puzzled over why Blau would paint the same scene twice; but if you look closely at both works, the first shows signs of corrosion, while the second is downright bloody.

The large oil "For Closure," her most ambitious piece in terms of color and composition, depicts a clapboard farmhouse whose roof bursts with multicolored angular shapes like so many shards of vibrantly colored stained glass carried aloft on a billowing flower-printed fabric. My companion saw dreams scattered to the winds. I saw the chaos of modern life contrasted with an older, more stable past. You may see something entirely different. That's the power and beauty of art.

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