

Aaron Morse's Artistic Jumble of the Deep

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--Alie Ward



The paintings of Los Angeles-based artist Aaron Morse resemble what might happen if you stuffed history and a rainbow in your purse, then dumped the contents out onto a countertop.

His compositions are a jumble of imagery, a chaotic watery collage of animals, elements of nature and pop cultural references represented in psychedelic bleeds of color.

In his new show at ACME Gallery, he incorporates a handful of aquatic-themed pieces, like the acrylic, watercolor and graphite "Maritime (#2)," wherein translucent moss-colored ships loom at the top of the frame, above a sea as black as ink and splayed into a

flat mesa crammed with sea creatures. Amid a piscine kaleidoscope, a whale chomps on a bodiless tentacle, and eels and sharks menace from within the tangle.

Curious about his relationship with the sea, Brand X's Alie Ward tracked Morse down and asked how water seeps its way into his work.

BX: As an Angeleno and an Arizona native, is water (or the lack thereof) something that influences you subconsciously?

Aaron Morse: I'm sure that it does. So much of the geography and history of the Southwest and California has been shaped by water -- often literally through erosion and the growth of cities. Los Angeles sucking the Owens Valley dry is a famous example. I often think of those desert canyons cut by rivers, some of which disappeared long ago.

BX: Do you visit certain locales for inspiration? *The answer... after the jump.*

AM: I visit the L.A. beaches and the port regularly, and I know I must internalize that information, but I work very little from direct interactions with the landscape. My ideas for pictures come more from memory or are synthesized from other sources, like old books. When I was a kid, my family spent a lot of time at the Oregon coast. The sky and ocean there are tremendously dynamic and powerful, and so is the jagged coastline. I think this was the beginning of my feeling for the ocean as a subject.

BX: The sea is sometimes represented as very dark or black in color in your pieces. Where did your visions of "the deep" originate?

AM: I've watched many nature documentaries and have always been fascinated by the ones that show an alien world that exists in the deep sea where there is no light. I often like to paint my seas a dark color to heighten the drama, and I sometimes use colors other than blue or green to diverge from clichés and add interest. Also, if the sea is made red or a strange metallic color, it calls into question the "rightness" of the picture and whether this is our world or another. It can also imply pollution or foreshadow catastrophe.

BX: Through your work, is there any social change you secretly hope to incite?

AM: I think these days it's impossible not to consider ecology. Pollution, destruction of the environment and global warming are alarming to us as citizens. As an artist, I find these subjects resonant and provocative -- they describe a component of our collective psychology that should be reckoned with. How have current events, from social topics to climate change, influenced your paintings? I think my work has gained complexity. Like many, I was angered by the Bush years, fascinated by the development of the Internet, inspired by Obama and informed on so many subjects brought to us so easily by the Information Age. But the mediated parts of our lives only tell us so much. Real experiences, travel, adventure, human contact -- that's where it's at.