

Works Combining Beauty With Brains

ART REVIEWS

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A small two-person show by Las Vegas-based painters **Jack Hallberg** and **Yek** reveals how many viewers treat contemporary art in the same way sexist treat women. If a painting or sculpture is drop-dead beautiful, people often assume it's neither smart nor serious, but some kind of bimbo whose good looks are accompanied by cluelessness.

While the feminist movement changed the world by showing us that beauty and intelligence are in no way opposed, the art world has become something of a refuge for curmudgeons who can't quite accept this fact. Strange as it may seem, contemporary art can be too beautiful for its own good.

At Post Gallery, Hallberg and Yek mock this conservative idea by presenting paintings that are as ravishing as they are rigorous. Titled "Goofy and Off-Center," their fun-loving show begins by pretending to be little more than a pleasant diversion from everyday drudgery and art-world solemnity.

Bright colors and playful shapes greet visitors to the dimly lit gallery, which is animated by a sense of strange weightlessness. The backgrounds of Hallberg's square panels are painted an extremely dull gray, which seems to suck the light right out of the room. Consequently, the 3-D dots that populate his otherwise flat images

look as if they're suspended in midair, like cartoon versions of enlarged microorganisms that have taken on a life of their own.

For their part, Yek's four curved panels appear to glow from within—like cybernetic sunsets or designer drinks served by a bartender who favors cool refreshments with unnaturally enhanced hues. In front of these dazzling expanses of impure color, razor-sharp lines bounce around, guiding your eyeballs off into infinity.

Aside from entertaining viewers with optical razzle-dazzle, both artists' paintings present thoughtful meditations on spatial ambiguity. Although these works might be dismissed for merely revisiting 1960s psychedelia, they are equally indebted to the Light and Space Movement, whose trippy installations from that era also turned apparent emptiness into mind-blowing experiences of visual resplendence.

Hallberg and Yek raise the stakes of their argument against ugliness by bathing their paintings in a sexy mixture of ordinary illumination and fluorescent black light. If brains and beauty can go hand in hand, why can't tacky glamour and abstract painting be two sides of the same coin?

■ *Post Gallery, 1904 E. 7th Place, (213) 622-8580, through Aug. 29. Closed Sunday through Tuesday.*