

## Rebecca Hamm, Defining Nature by Christopher Michno January, 2009

**From Defining Nature at LACMA– written by Christopher Michno, exhibition curated by Nancy Kaye at the Art Rental and Sales Gallery at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, November 7, 2008 through January 8, 2009.**

A duality of the awareness of human impact on the environment, and the idea of nature as a dynamic system in which humanity is but a small part, presses upon Rebecca Hamm's notion of landscape painting. Hamm's work has long functioned to apprehend and transmit her experience of the natural world, and with her recent series of paintings, Hamm has begun to systematize this concern. Previous works are composed in traditional pictorial modes; they are primarily landscapes which depict a place or an event. In 2007, the artist began working on a series of four foot by six foot watercolors in which she communicates an impression of her experience of nature – a gestalt rather than a specific scene or memory. Hamm imparts an aura of free association: pictorial representation remains, but Hamm limits it to allusive passages within overall patterns – a branch, a leaf, a stone, or the sensation of running water. In Hamm's painting, which has become abstract while remaining descriptive, images unfold in a loose geometric format, resembling the large-scale grids characteristic of aerial photographs. The paintings evoke the macro-view of landscape as seen from 15,000 feet.

Hamm's pursuit of pure description grows out of two large, oil on gesso on paper, paintings from 2001; constructed from numerous sheets of heavy, cotton paper, both works appear fragmented. These assemblages, jig-sawed together, convey informality; pinned to the wall, they underscore the fragility of the natural world. Red Tree, which is 12 feet high, depicts a pine that died from a bark beetle infestation. The image of the pine materializes out of a pointillist style in this atmospheric painting, and the work sustains the illusion of the thick, shimmering air quality of the Los Angeles basin.

Similarly composed on multiple sheets of cotton paper, Wilderness Park, an extensive vista of the local foothills above Claremont, segments the artist's experience of nature into multiple vantage points. This decentralized approach to her imagery results in work that is larger than the sum of its parts, and Hamm employs this course in her current series of paintings. Rather than rough edges and segmented surfaces, however, Hamm's new paintings offer a seamless structure and smooth continuous skins, while the visual information swirls in blips and dots and the coarse bark of branches. In these new paintings, Hamm relates an ephemeral experience of place and affords a synthesis of fracture and continuity.

Christopher Michno  
Los Angeles, January 2009

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