



Jenn Shifflet, *Sky Reverie*, oil on panel, 12" x 12", at Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, Oakland.

## Keira Kotler and Jenn Shifflet at Chandra Cerrito Contemporary

**T**he relatively new Chandra Cerrito Contemporary is nestled in a snug, loft-like space, hovering above another gallery; the stairs leading up to the space are inscribed with a poem by Geri Digiorno, poet laureate of Sonoma, California. All of this creates a more than appropriate setting for the recent show featuring Keira Kotler and Jenn Shifflet. Both Shifflet and Kotler play with space and light, smallness and bigness to produce landscapes that are as much—or

more—interior ones than exterior.

Kotler's light-jet images are extreme photographic close-ups, and thus more blur than line—and certainly contain no discernible object—but the digital print gives them a clarity that turns the blur to luminescent aura rather than mud. They are printed on aluminum sheets, which gives them an internal gleam that echoes the light of the images themselves. Each piece is a field of color and light, with no way to determine where one begins and the other ends.

Kotler purports to be influenced by yogic or Buddhist contemplation, a kind of studied quietness that brings one's attention to things "usually taken for granted." But, although what we are looking at are photographs of objects, what we see is nothing that exists in our usual sensory world. They are meditative, almost hallucinogenic pieces that draw the viewer in like portals to some other existence without ground or horizon—just light and space. There is no way to tell, really, if these images bring one too close to something or too far away from the known world. *Lumina: Mauve* may have just the fuzzy limits of a face within its field of color; *Lumina: Yellow* almost has a horizon, but even that floats and shifts and has no determined location; in *Lumina: Purple*, smears of blue sneak and seep in to the frame, but it may be that they are only tricks of light. Seeing an object this close-up divests it of its objectness, and turns it into a blurry swath of sky, an otherworldly sand/sun-scape, a well of light—something distant yet captivating, accessible only when given the time it is due. The lack of lines, edges, hard shapes, distinctions between figure and ground opens up an unlimited expanse beyond the frame.

Because Shifflet's oils mirror Kotler's investigations in certain ways, the two artists' works do seem a natural pairing. Shifflet also explores space and light—all the titles of her pieces reflect a preoccupation with luminosity and air—and she also eschews horizon lines and creates a luminescent dimensionality that has nothing to do with architecture. But Shifflet's oils are thick and glossy with a texture eschewed by Kotler's digital prints. Indeed, it may be better to view these works at a certain distance—too close up and the paint's impasto becomes something of a distraction. But, at the ideal distance of five or ten feet, the eye turns the sometimes imprecise brushstrokes into perfect orbs.

Shifflet's works are like waking up on the floor after a very lovely, very posh party, and gazing through an intoxicated haze at a Tiffany chandelier suspended from a gilded ceiling. You can almost hear the tinkling of the crystal, the ripe silence it amplifies. Or swimming through a dreamscape and coming upon the welcoming streetlights of Atlantis.

Shifflet alternates between an ochre and gold palette and a sea-green one—the serene and the aquatic. Yet all of the paintings share the same visual thematic: thick, luminescent space furnished with clusters of glowing orbs—like grapes of ice or light—and strands that whisper down like gentle curtains. These eerie shapes have a solidity within them that Kotler's images do not. *Finding Elusive Spaciousness*, Shifflet's largest work, a four-by-five-foot entrance into a fairy cave, glitters with shadows and light. *Effervescently Adrift* combines ochres and turquoises, like the floor of a shallow, glittering sea. And *Luminance* features a nova explosion of light against a background of teal. Both Shifflet and Kotler present us with the sense of being suspended in water or sky or a space we've never been given access to before. This quality produces both anxiety and peace: We have been drawn into the secret spaces of childhood imagination or adult intoxication.

—Jakki Spicer

Keira Kotler & Jenn Shifflet closed in November at Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, Oakland.

Jakki Spicer is a freelance writer based in Alameda.

Below:  
Images of work by Keira Kotler (left) and Jenn Shifflet (right)

