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Review: Doyle Gertjensen's floating world in *Faith and Reason II*

The artist's work is at Callan Contemporary through Sept. 20

By D. Eric Bookhardt



Doyle Gertjensen: *Faith and Reason II*

In 1904, the great French cinema pioneer Georges Melies released his silent film classic, *The Impossible Voyage*, about a farcically misguided scientific expedition to the sun. Although an amazing innovator himself, Melies portrayed science as a disorienting force that always took people back to the same old human foibles in a new form.

Doyle Gertjeansen's fantastical abstract paintings in this Faith and Reason II show express no pointed opinions, but they do in some ways reflect the disorientation posed by technological advances happening faster than most people can assimilate. What we see suggests a floating world where bits and pieces of our planet seem to levitate and share space with the marks and brush strokes that traditionally have been used to depict what we see around us. That slippery relationship between the real world and the techniques people have used to depict it is the implicit underlying subject of this whimsical painterly investigation.

Petroglyph 2 is emblematic in the way it recalls Gertjeansen's earlier obsession with continental topography via its suggestions of flinty mountain ranges, verdant forests and dark crimson lava flows punctuated with fat, gloopy brushstrokes, as if a dissatisfied creator god had decided to paint over parts of a newly minted planet. In Aztec, those dense physical structures seem to have been distilled into a floating realm of cryptic symbols that resonate the ominous incantations of long-dead languages. But the title piece, Faith and Reason II, 2017 (pictured), is as buoyant as a Latin jazz riff in which dense clusters of blue notes and hot brassy jazz stanzas are contrapuntally defined by free-form percussive undulations.

Gertjeansen's emphasis on basic mark making harks to the origins of our long, strange trip into an ever more elaborate mass-mediated mirror maze of endless electronically reproduced imagery where digital technology and virtual reality are just the latest, most turbocharged examples of humanity's history of messing with stuff that ends up messing with our own heads in the process.