

Kara Maria

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Impact of Jim Hodges, Kara Maria gallery shows impossible to reproduce

By Charles Desmarais  
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Kara Maria, "California Grizzly Bear" (2016), detail (Courtesy: Artist and Catharine Clark Gallery)

I have a friend — a well-known artist and critic for whom I have great respect — who says that all people make judgments about paintings based upon what they see in reproduction. I do not, and I am quite convinced others shouldn't, either.

Reproductions can be useful tools. They remind us of works we have seen in person; they hint at what is in store.

Considered in the light of works we know from direct engagement, they can suggest themes and patterns in an overall body of work. But trying to understand or appreciate art — particularly painting, which relies so heavily upon texture, color and scale — by looking at its photographic likeness is like tasting food from a TV screen.

Kara Maria's exhibition "Post-Nature" at Catharine Clark Gallery (through March 17) and Jim Hodges' "Silence Stillness" at Anthony Meier Fine Arts (through March 23) have little in common but their utter irreproducibility in print or pixels. You need to get yourself in front of the actual works.



Kara Maria, "Mayday" (2017), (Courtesy: Artist and Catharine Clark Gallery)

Both artists do have old-fashioned painterly skills. Maria employs hers with what at first appears to be wild abandon, applying brilliant color using a range of abstract strategies. Upon more careful consideration, however, it's clear that what looks untamed is precisely planned.

On a single canvas, she might combine daubs and smears, aerosol bursts, and broad, featureless swaths of paint contained within precise hard edges. Forms loop, streak and explode across the picture plane, giving here an impression of flat design, there the illusion of storyland dimensionality.

The visual metaphor of feral versus restrained is suited to the subject of her exhibition. That theme dawns upon us as we pick through the abstract tangle to

discover minutely detailed portraits of animal representatives of endangered species. Some are very shy, like the wolf lost in a work on paper called "Moondance." But even the big-eyed primate (a lemur?) staring out from the center of "Mayday" is lost at first amid the painter's frenetic sensual assault. It is telling that the animals, in every case, occupy the calm and still moments in a frenzied, decidedly unnatural environment.

In other works, we see specific evidence of modern encroachment on nature. A submarine lurks in the depths of a whale shark's expressionistic habitat in "Into the Blue," an assault weapon emerges from a swipe of color in "Trump's Bee."

We leave the exhibition with the sense of an artist casting about, seeking to find an outlet for righteous anger, a use for prodigious technical skills. Its energy is seductive, the earnestness of its sympathy admirable, but it's about as nuanced as an email typed all in caps.



Kara Maria, "Moondance" (2017), (Courtesy: Artist and Catharine Clark Gallery)

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Kara Maria: "Post-Nature": 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Tuesdays-Fridays; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays.  
Through March 17. Free. Catharine Clark Gallery, 248 Utah St., S.F. (415) 399-1439.  
<https://cclarkgallery.com>