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VIRGINIA KATZ

By Constance Mallinson

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In 2003, Virginia Katz's "drawings" consisted of the patterns created by waves on partially submerged paper, or by pigmented tree branches as they swayed over attached sheets of paper. In the more recent works on view in her show "Charted Territories," she continues to explore the similarities between marks made by the hand and by nature, while pondering the implications of human interactions with and interventions in the natural arena.

Katz's "Mud" series (2011) comprises modestly sized wood panels layered with several inches of oil paint, then carved like clay to resemble geological forms or to evoke the sculpting effects of flowing water, wind and erosion on the land. Due to the hefty physicality of the paint and the panels' natural brown, rust, green and white coloration, the works have the appearance of the dried mud of riverbeds, canyon rock walls, mountain peaks or ice floes. Recalling 3-D casts of the earth's surface by the British collaborative The Boyle Family, Katz's landscape vacillates between being pictured and being made concrete as object or souvenir.

Katz creates her richly textured and patterned "Formations" (2007-ongoing) and "Paths" (2010) by painting, drawing, collaging and monoprinting with leaves, vines, bark, soil and crumpled foil drenched in ink. Inspired by aerial and NASA satellite images of earth as well as by direct observation of physical phenomena gleaned from daily walks, these works are as much absorbing, near-hallucinogenic abstractions as lushly rendered topographies, atmospheres and environments. Scale is constantly destabilized. In *Formations—Mixed Terrain* (2009), for example, intricate networks of turquoise, brown and gold rivulets might describe either a detail of a polished stone or entire coastlines with sand dunes, inland waterways, wetlands and algae blooms, perceived from afar. Such suggested shifts in scale, in tandem with infinitely nuanced color and a diversity of technical effects—feathering, crackling, diffusing, bubbling, dusting, mottling and streaking—create multiple associations, some charged with awe and terror. The Turneresque *Formations—Red & Gray Dust Cloud* (2011), with its misty or smoky blacks punctuated by flashes of red, gold and white, evokes galactic mayhem, electrical storms, devastating wildfires, shots of nighttime bombing raids and microscopic cross sections of tumorous tissues, all at once. Such insinuations of catastrophe argue a continuing relevance for the tradition of the sublime landscape, which Katz

engages to express the disjunction between the wonders that scientific technology affords us and our subjective experience of its attendant beauties and horrors.

Photo: Virginia Katz: Mud—NE, 2010, oil and gesso on panel, 16 by 20 inches; at Ruth Bachofner.

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