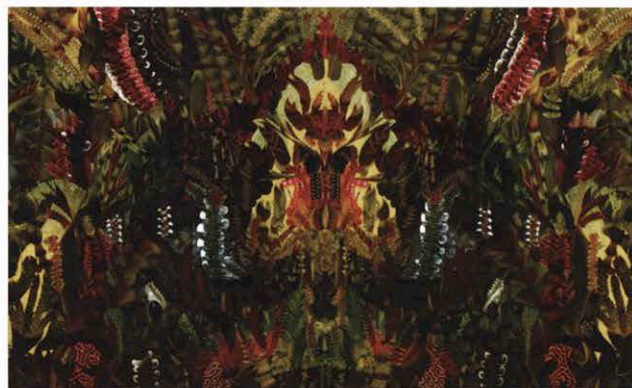


ANDY HARPER

DANESE

British painter Andy Harper's first one-person show in New York offered a lush antidote to English stunt art, and also to the recent spate of "bad" painting in the States. Using the most traditional of means—oil on linen—Harper makes paintings that are an allover webbing of plant forms. Though meticulous, they are not stuffy or academic.

Generally using paint with the consistency of a glaze and an old-masterish palette of earthy browns, greens and yellows along with the occasional violet, Harper depicts a rich tapestry of flora, some of it observed and some imagined. Occasionally the dense mat of vegetation conspires to create hallucinogenic configurations, the stems, buds, blossoms and branches forming symmetrical abstract patterns—a compositional strategy reminiscent of Arcimboldo's 16th-century portraits, in which the faces are assembled from fruit and vegetables. In the convincing three-dimensionality and unexpected depth given to every stroke, an effect highlighted with tiny points of light, Harper's paintings also call to mind the elegiac canvases of Ross Bleckner. And in its labor-intensive process, Harper's work bears some resemblance to that of Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, the obsessive visionary artist.



Andy Harper: *The God Particle*, 2008, oil on linen, 43¼ by 71 inches; at Danese.

Areas of light appear in symmetrical arrangements amid the tangle of branches and buds in *The God Particle* (43¼ by 71 inches, 2008), which evokes a Rorschach test; the overall shape of its patterning suggests a shrine or altar. *Strobe Flower* (2009) and *Replicator* (2000), both 51 inches square, are composed of concentric circular forms recalling mandalas, or the fractured images formed inside a kaleidoscope. The concern with mortality expressed in memento mori and *vanitas* imagery are shared by all of Harper's paintings; close inspection reveals tiny bones and other anatomical references in several.

Shown in a side room were smaller works on paper that are as detailed as the paintings and more closely resemble botanical studies. Executed in oil on paper, they sometimes depict plant life arranged in bouquetlike bunches on monochromatic grounds. Suffused by the dim light of enchantment, they recall Victorian fairy painting. Like the larger works, those on paper have a welcome eccentricity; all convey a pixilated mood not expressed in painting for some time.

—Stephen Mueller