

DANES E

COREY



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18,
2009

What to See in New York:
Andy Harper at Danese



London-based painter Andy Harper is having his first solo US show at Danese gallery this month. The show features an array of mostly large-scale paintings and mono prints immaculately displayed in Danese's lofty sky-lit space.

Harper's paintings of abstracted flora and fauna have to be seen to be believed. Across the smooth surface of the canvasses, thin gels of color are scraped, pushed and blotted to create writhing animated vegetal forms that crowd and push each other in densely packed spaces. The colors are hot, emitting glowing patches of light filtering through the shadowy darkness of his undulating plant forms. They are reminiscent of underwater regions choked with algae and seaweeds, or rich lush tropical rain forests. The overall effect is beautiful but infernal.

There is a decidedly hellish aspect to his work, where survival and the ability to flourish means crowding out or covering up some other living thing. The world shown in these paintings emits the strong scent of decay,

underscored by the odd bit of bone-like forms and things that resemble internal organs as much as plant matter, wriggling between the leaves. The best works have a kind of all-over composition: it seems important to have a complex randomness here, as if one were looking at a slice of something which expands well beyond the boundaries of the canvas.

Some of the works have more obvious imagery, such as femurs and skulls inserted in them as well. This seems a gratuitous and illustrational route to take when the work beautifully presents it's harrowing subject matter without them.

The surfaces and paint handling in all of his paintings is astonishing. Harper has a swift, virtuosic hand with the brush, and the semi-liquid, gelatinous quality of his paint perfectly serves the curvaceous and rapacious forms he pushes across his fields of canvas. There is a true rapport between the way that the images are formed and what the images themselves depict that make being any more explicit with the content seem unnecessary.

Harper's work paints a funny line between being very old fashioned (he references Bosch, botanical illustration and 17th C. Dutch painting as much as anything else), and very contemporary: the freshness of his mark-making, the all-over surface patterning are like a re-working of Pollock and de Kooning for a post-Vietnam war era.



Andy Harper: Recent Paintings and Works on Paper
October 16 - November 14, 2009