

KATE BRIGHT



LOCKS GALLERY



*Spring (River Avon)*, 2002, acrylic and resin on canvas, 60 x 84 inches

Reality is there but it shimmers, warps, begins to disintegrate...only to recompose itself, snap back into order...and then start shuddering and breaking up again. Is Kate Bright a realist, or some kind of perverse abstractionist, using nature as a back door to Pollock-esque all-over gesturalism? The fact is, I'm not sure those distinctions mean much to her. More to the point is the synthetic reconstruction of vision that is only possible when image and abstraction are confounded. When I first came upon her work she was painting snowy mountaintops, postcard-pretty—there was a strong Pop element to those pictures but this has receded as her work has deepened. What was at stake was never mass-produced imagery as such, only the extreme artifice that makes such imagery possible. Now, as the London locales name-checked in some of her titles suggest—*Regent's Park, Clarence Gate, Little Venice*—a different degree of topographical specificity has entered into Bright's work. And yet who would ever be able to recognize those places in these paintings? Thanks to the metaphor of reflection—a word that signifies an effect of light, but also consciousness—their relentlessly tight focus turns the objective world of trees, air, and water into a subjective vision so all-encompassing as to border on the hallucinatory: “extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colors...alternating, variegated, opening and then closing themselves in circles and spirals, exploding in colored fountains, rearranging and hybridizing themselves in constant flux.” The words are those of Dr. Albert Hoffmann, from the memoir in which he

describes what he experienced in 1943 when he first tested on himself a compound he had synthesized in his laboratory at the Swiss pharmaceutical firm Sandoz—LSD-25. I cite them not because I imagine that Bright takes any special interest in pharmaceutically-induced distortions of consciousness—acrylic paint and resin are effective enough for her, it seems. In any case, I could just as easily have cited, instead, Kenneth Rexroth's account of the experiences communicated by the mystical poets: “shattered and refracted light, indefinite depths, weightlessness...and synthesizing these sensations and affects, an all-consuming clarity.” This destructuring and restructuring of perceptual experience—a unity contingent on a preceding fragmentation, and therefore a self-aware accomplishment of mind—is something very close to the *raison d'être* of art as such. But how rarely does an artist grasp this essence with such ruthless intensity—Kate Bright does.

*Barry Schwabsky*

References:

Albert Hoffmann, *LSD—My Problem Child*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.

Kenneth Rexroth, *World Outside the Window: Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth*. New York: New Directions, 1987.

Barry Schwabsky is the author of *The Widening Circle: Consequences of Modernism in Contemporary Art* (Cambridge University Press) and *Opera: Poems, 1981-2002* (Meritage Press) as well as co-editor of international reviews for *Artforum*.