
Certiifiably organic: David Solomon's paintings at Patina Gallery

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Iris McLister

When David Solomon moved out west nearly 20 years ago, he brought the colors and moods of his South Florida home with him. The selection of brilliantly abstracted, riotously strange new paintings in Patina Gallery's exhibition *Shape Shifter* recalls the distinctive natural environments of both Florida and Santa Fe, where he's lived for more than a dozen years. A veteran of the local art scene, Solomon has organized exhibitions, installed and curated shows, bought and sold art, and steadfastly maintained an active painting schedule.

Since 2009, Solomon has painted on aluminum panels, which afford him a totally flat, nonporous surface, a negation of what he calls the "visual content" of canvas and linen. For his current body of work, he focused on refining and retooling shapes and symbols he's long been fascinated with, injecting them with the unexpected, sometimes freaky color pairings that might well be considered



Icon I, 2014, Oil on aluminum panel, 36 x 30 inches

his calling card. In these paintings, amorphous blobs float contentedly across thickly textured, heavily brush-stroked backgrounds. Recurring across many are shapes like elongated eyeballs or slender footballs — but, most of all, like seedpods. In turns translucent and opaque, they're spanned with lines that look like the veins in a leaf. "I've been thinking of this latest body of work as a type of 'systematic abstraction,'" Solomon told *Pasatiempo*. "While the parts in previous paintings operated by themselves in an environment, it was more refined. I wanted more action happening in the picture. These newer pieces have multiple main characters that interact with each other."

Maybe this deliberate anthropomorphizing explains why walking up to a piece like the dynamic, wildly colored *Body Bomb Redux* feels like barging into a private conversation. Matte areas of color are interspersed with drippy trails of mauve and black. The work's central form looks like a sliced-open honeycomb, whose pale blue and navy interior cells seem tender and alive, with pulses that expand and contract before our eyes. They're exposed, and so are we in viewing them. Solomon has a conscientious reverence for the natural environments of his past. He described childhood visits to family in upstate New York by naming their climatic attributes: "packed-in, dense, and muggy." His childhood was a difficult one, and he took refuge by learning to read at a very young age. "Books created a mind for me that was immediately out of the box. Reading made me observe systems and pay attention."

Solomon's fascination with organic schemes and outdoor environments is powerfully manifested in *System II*, which feels distinctly Floridian. The painting's washy, pale green background and yellow undertones, taken together, suggest an almost-ripe lemon; its black-outlined central object contains a color like bleached pavement. At first, the work's rounded center lends



System II, 2014, Oil on aluminum panel, 36 x 48 inches

it a malleable, mammalian softness, embellished as it is with three smaller, imperfectly rounded balls or nodes, the largest of which is pricked all over with

red polka dots. Against its muted but glowing green background, the central orb looks especially clean and crisp, even self-conscious in its stay-in-the-lines deliberation. Triangular strips of black and white gather together in a knife-sharp point that's poised to puncture a lined seedpod at the top of the circle. Solomon likened this shape to a pyramid or a paved road, representative of a "path to knowledge, enlightenment, or power — but also transmitting something to the seed shape. We live in a multi-parallel universe with many versions of reality." Solomon means for his work to have layers, and if your brain takes time to sort through them, your eyeballs will be doing happy backflips.



The Schmoopy Painting, 2014, Oil on aluminum panel, 60 x 48 inches

Imposingly large and fantastically — immodestly — pink, *The Schmoopy Painting* occupies a wall to the immediate left of the gallery's entrance. It's dominated by a group of shapes nestled into and around a softly rounded, pale pink object. Other forms hover just outside it protectively, as if orbiting their home planet. The lower portion of the panel contains oozy, many-layered drips of red, interrupted by a central chamber: it's that pyramid or highway again, whose tip meets the mouth of the pink object via a tiny, clear seedpod. Solomon is particularly excited by visual exchanges that beg questions not easily answered. "What are these two outer shapes creating?" he asked of *The Schmoopy Painting's* orbital forms.

"Is this a transmission of energy, or a protective encasement?" Solomon's earnest consideration of his paintings can't help but encourage a similar curiosity in the viewer.

Despite exaggerated drips and smears of neon orange and crimson, *Information II* is overwhelmingly dark. Its center contains various shapes, arranged in a jumble of texture and form, like a still life on an alien planet. Where some of the paintings have subtle transitions, *Icon I* is composed exclusively in fits and starts.

Its center object is a black-outlined, charcoal-colored shape the color of ash. It's a heart — probably the most recognizable shape in the show — suspended before a blazing, tomato-red background that's immediately surrounded by dozens of miniature yellow pinpricks and, farther out, by blue-rimmed black spots. All around the puffy, gray heart are black dashes — not embers, but daggers: the last dazzling flares of a spirit going out with a cacophony of shrieks and hisses.

Face Off with a Rose has Philip Guston-like blocks of smudgy pinks and reds, whose ragged interiors suggest something alarmingly intimate: blood, connective tissue, the wet insides of a body. It's a weirdo world of embryonic, cosmic shapes — of all-seeing, multi-irised eyeballs — a map without a key, a system that can't be cataloged or quantified. We're reminded of things we might not cognitively understand: quantum theory, voodoo, complex molecular structures. The background is gritty, even grungy, but the overlaying shapes contain uncannily precise angles and edges. As smitten as he is with abstraction, even Solomon's messiest and most unfettered paintings contain areas of eye-bending precision.

Solomon has shown at major Santa Fe galleries, but his last solo exhibit was in late 2011. The interim period has given him time to focus on exactly how and what he's creating, evidenced brilliantly in the quirky, powerful jewels of paintings on display at Patina Gallery. This downtown shop, known for high-craft furnishings and edgy, gorgeous jewelry, has never had an exhibition of paintings, making it a somewhat surprising venue for Solomon — something that's not lost on him. "How brave and cool is it that a gallery that specializes in fine jewelry chooses some weird and wild local contemporary painting to celebrate? What a blast!" ◀

Details:

- ▼ David Solomon: *Shape Shifter*
- ▼ Opening reception 5 p.m. Friday, July 11; exhibit through Aug. 24
- ▼ Patina Gallery, 131 W. Palace Ave., 505-986-3432