

Luminescent 'Dreaming'

Drawings and sculptures transform the dark

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Anxiety and cleverness

Painter Alisha Kerlin, who has a show at LaMontagne Gallery, would likely appreciate Rothschild's abandon — but it might put her off, too. Anxiety dominates Kerlin's work. Her canvases feature voluptuous backgrounds agitated with brush strokes, which to me feel like their driving force. She then introduces foreground elements — a carrot dangling on a stick, a tape measure crossing the length of the canvas — that pop off the lush backgrounds in a way that feels too clever. She plays further intellectual games with her titles, which in many cases she mounts

in wood blocks beneath the paintings.

"She hovered anxiously in the background," for instance. It almost begs psychoanalysis: There's no she (is it the artist?), just a bright orange carrot on a string, a few truncated saplings, and a gorgeous, roiling green backdrop. The title points us to that disquieting green; the hanging carrot is even a metaphor for distraction.

I preferred "With one's back to or up against the wall," in which the surface gestures, like dark birds in the sky, balance with and lead us into the breathtaking background, which is looping and mused with layers of lavender, pink, peach, and ghostly dashes of mint green. Kerlin's paintings have a lot of richness, but they're overthought. Unlike Rothschild, who is decades older (and, granted, from a different, less conceptual, school of thought), she hasn't yet surrendered to the paint.

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In Alisha Kerlin's "With one's back to or up against the wall," at LaMontagne Gallery, surface gestures, like dark birds in the sky, lead viewers into the breathtaking background.

JUDY HABERL: Dystopian Dreaming
DEBRA WEISBERG: Dystopian Dreaming
At: Gallery Kayafas, 450 Harrison Ave.,
through Nov. 26. 617-482-0411,
www.gallerykayafas.com

JO ANN ROTHSCHILD: Waverly Road
At: HallSpace, 950 Dorchester Ave.,
Dorchester, through Nov. 26. 617-288-
2255, www.hallspace.org

**ALISHA KERLIN: In the distance
she could see the clear blue sea**
At: LaMontagne Gallery, 555 East
Second St., South Boston,
through Nov. 18. 617-482-8400,
www.lamontagnegallery.com