

Review
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Max Jansons relishes 'Freedom'

By David Pagel

After an exhibition at a prominent Los Angeles venue fell through last year, Max Jansons hung two years' worth of paintings in his Ocean Park studio, set regular business hours, sent out announcements and ran his own start-up gallery.

After a month, he took his paints out of storage, scraped the sign off the front window, pulled down the blinds and went back to being a full-time painter.

This year, he has again turned his studio into a gallery. The 11 little paintings in "Max Jansons: Freedom" are looser and goofier than anything he has made. They're also sensual, intimate and slow, characteristics that have become Jansons' trademark.

The combo is potent. It reveals an artist who takes pleasure seriously, is not afraid to go it alone and always seeks to go a bit further, just to see what there is to see. That leaves viewers with lots to look at, more to enjoy and even more to contemplate.

A tug of war between patience and restlessness is palpable in all of Jansons' oils on linen. Two are still lifes: exquisite pictures of cartoon flowers in cartoon vases on cartoon tables that, somehow, are as beautiful as the real thing. The contours of Jansons' petals, stems and leaves guide your eyes on circuitous, loop-the-loop journeys, leaving plenty of time — and space — for on-your-own discoveries.

The other nine paintings are eccentric abstractions. Their jigsaw-style compositions amplify the visual energy while never getting pushy nor losing the light touch that is essential to Jansons' art. His muted colors and lovely brushwork take the edge off the sharply angled fragments of the fractured patterns, creating strangely harmonious — yet playfully unsettled — arrangements.

Every one of Jansons' paintings pulses to a beat all its own. Knowing when to go slowly and when to let things rip never looked better.

Critic's Choice: "Max Jansons: Freedom," Ocean Park Studio, 2520 18th St., Santa Monica, (310) 871-0090, through June 28. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.maxjansons.net