

## Chris Vasell

Blum & Poe  
Los Angeles

The 1960s battles between the proponents of Post-Painterly Abstraction and those of Op art may seem like ancient history, but Chris Vasell boldly took up the cause, or rather both causes, in two distinct collections here, hung in adjacent galleries.

"To The People That Know This Is Nowhere" (2009), installed in the first gallery, consisted of five large stained canvases, each with acrylics poured and possibly even lightly brushed on to evoke pastel clouds. The standout was *Implosion Commission*, its two panels mounted in a corner. The central, seemingly floral motif blossoms outward (or inward, perhaps) in undulating lines of spring green and aqua. *Dr. Chlorophyll* is a towering vertical piece covered in wriggly, flowing shapes in sea foam, bisque, and apricot. Psychedelic, decorative, subterranean—all such descriptions apply.

Three paintings in the second gallery were from the series "To The People of Los Angeles" (2007–9). The untitled canvases, each measuring 152 by 114 inches, seemed to vibrate with their geometric patterning made by placing small raw-canvas squares in checkerboard fashion atop large concentric circles painted in soft peach, sage, and tan. Constructed in a similar fashion, the strongest painting in the show, *Marengo Tango* (2009), was the only representative from the series



Chris Vasell, *Implosion Commission*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, each panel 107" x 90". Blum & Poe.

addressed "To The People of Alhambra," referring to a suburb east of Los Angeles where Vasell keeps his studio. Covered in a systematic pattern of black painted squares and squares of raw canvas, it plays with potent optical illusions of three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional surface.

Seemingly without irony or conceit, Vasell embraces two esthetics that marked postwar formalism, and finds new ways to exploit each.

—Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

## Nicholas Nixon

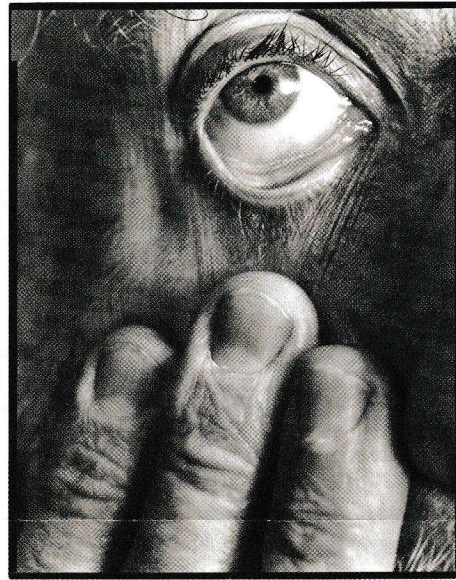
Fraenkel  
San Francisco

The way pictures from Nicholas Nixon's recent series "Self" and "City" were carefully interspersed here worked to the benefit of both bodies of work. The titles alone describe a polarity that broadly characterizes modern society, and the show's pairings of fragmented self-portraits and overcrowded architectural views translated easily into collisions of introversion and extroversion.

Nixon's self-portraits deliberately walk the line between evasion and revelation, offering partial likenesses that make viewers feel they might have breached the artist's defenses. Some of these images gained meaning from their proximity to cityscapes. A close-up of Nixon rolling an eye upward as he pulls down on his cheek found a curious counterpart

in a reflected scene in which a curved glass facade seems to warp the space between buildings. The facial distortion took on a self-parodic attitude, suggesting a special power, such as the photographer's ability to see around corners.

In the long view of Nixon's career, the passage of time and the manner in which photography detects and marks it pro-



Nicholas Nixon, *Self (4), Brookline*, 2009, gelatin silver print, 14" x 11". Fraenkel.

vide the primary connective tissue of his work. His most famous series, "The Brown Sisters," records the reunions of four sisters—one of them his wife—over several decades as their individuality and their family resemblances evolve.

Nixon's fascination with time continues in "Self" and "City." In lieu of showing the artist at earlier ages, the Fraenkel exhibition explored the contrast between architecture's durability and the vulnerability of flesh, a contrast made especially vivid through Nixon's view camera.

—Kenneth Baker

## Raïssa Venables

Klaudia Marr  
Santa Fe

Raïssa Venables makes striking portraits of architectural interiors. These views, pieced together from various shots, are animated by their saturated colors and shifting perspectives. And although people are never shown in these rooms, there is a strong sense of narrative throughout.

Venables's process moves from traditional photography to handicraft to digital reproduction. No special lenses or filters are involved. The artist simply shoots scores of photos of interiors, cuts up the images, and reassembles them manually, which accounts for their notable distortions. The finished collage is then scanned; cut marks are cleaned up digitally before final prints are created.