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Marks makes mark on Palmer Gallery walls with abstract art

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How many of us have ever considered the possibility that a personified blob of paint could be the protagonist of a series of art installations and paintings? Probably not too many. But abstract artist Melissa Marks's installation at the James W. Palmer III Gallery from Oct. 5 to Oct. 23 does just that.

When Marks came to New York City 15 years ago as a young graduate from Yale School of Art, she sought inspiration from a multitude of sources ranging from Renaissance frescos, Japanese anime and even Walt Disney to create her own unique style of artistic expression. "I wanted to find a way to incorporate movement, humor, emotional complexity and great big stories into an abstract painting. I called it narrative abstraction," says Marks.

Today, she is the creator of *Adventures of Volitia*, a series of drawings and installations that depict the story of a character who has no corporeal shape or form, but rather is in a constant state of change. "I imagined that a detachable drip/mutable blob/Pollock leftover, rose up, caught a glimpse of itself in the mirror, and became self aware. Volitia became a hybrid hero, part Superman, part Eve—creation come to life," says Marks.

Volitia is a female character who is in constant motion, exploring the world around her and always on the lookout for new avenues. Marks derived the name Volitia from the word volition, which means the making of a choice or decision of one's own accord. The name is meant

to reflect Volitia's independent and restless nature: Her character is spirited and wants to decide the course of her own life. With the presence of a strong female protagonist, Marks has added a considerable feminine touch to the chiefly male-dominated landscape of abstract art.

The latest set of installations that continue to chronicle Volitia's adventures are called *Adventures of Volitia: Paradise, Again*. In Marks's own words: "This series makes the Garden of Eden Volitia's playground."

Volitia is depicted as an Eve-like character, except that she has left Eden of her own free will and has not been expelled: For Volitia, the world outside of Paradise is much more intriguing. The freedom this strange new world gives her, as well as the restrictions it imposes upon her, all weave together to form a unique adventure. The message that Marks aims to give through this installation is of turning the unfamiliar into familiar and the idea of a second chance. After leaving Eden, Volitia finds a parallel universe that offers her a second chance and a fresh outlook on life.

Said Marks, "Paradise Again is a humorous way of saying, 'you have another chance,' if you can get past the monotony of mortality and work and turn it all into some spastic, mutable fun."

Marks uses various media like drawings, paintings, large scale wall-drawing installations and animations to piece together Volitia's adventures, each medium also contributing to the art itself. The collection consists of 11 color pencil drawings that culminate in a large two-

part wall installation. The installation depicts a boisterous and feisty Volitia, while the paintings show a more thoughtful, intimate and peaceful side of her. Volitia's personality is shown in such a way that highlights her most stellar attribute: her capability to change.

"Over time, the accumulation of all these adventures has created a picture of a complex, emotional self—an abstraction with her own weird history and unpredictable future. I like that this story is basically told through the manipulation of line and color. The words that run parallel to the drawings, the titles and presence of a "character" offer a way to talk about the work without trying to explain it in a literal way," says Marks.

Adventures of Volitia: Paradise, Again has been a part of a series of contemporary art called *Comma*, sponsored by the London-based art center Bloomberg SPACE. The Palmer Gallery at Vassar will be showcasing this new chapter in Volitia's story for the first time ever in the United States. "I love the opportunity of showing this work in a college setting, said Marks. "The Palmer Gallery is in a highly visible place with a lot student traffic and Volitia really only exists when she is seen."

"The wall drawing is like a performance as it will happen in the moment as a reaction to its particular setting at the Palmer Gallery, continued Marks. "The performance is important because it is another way to register the emotional pulse of my character. The performed line and the practice of drawing is at the core of *Adventures of Volitia*."



Juliana Halpert/The Miscellany News

Melissa Marks's series, *Adventures of Volitia*, lies ready to be hung in the James W. Palmer III Gallery. The series features the adventures of a personified, amorphous mass. The exhibit will open on Oct. 5.