

## Gallery Gourmet, Art Reviews: Landscapes and bowls, text as images, and political messages

Paul Manes, based on the evidence on view at Pan American Art Projects, can paint things as realistically as he chooses. *Bosco* depicts a densely wooded scene where sunlight falls on the lower brush in the foreground and trees with bare trunks rise to form a canopy of leaves in the background. The 60-by-60 inch painting is all humidity and stifling nature, as naturalistic as Barbizon School forest scene from more than 100 years ago. The scene recedes, however, into a disturbing dark patch that implies that getting lost in these woods would not be a pleasant experience.



Paul Manes, *Palmettos*, 2007

Compared with the naturalism of *Bosco*, the piles of lumber Mr. Manes returns to in several images have an almost sketchy quality. They fill the horizontal canvas and present the viewer with their sawn ends as kinds of variations on circular abstractions,

where splits and peeling bark enliven what could have been too strictly ordered compositions. By titling one of these paintings *For Mantegna*, Mr. Manes suggests it is both an exercise in foreshortened perspective and meditation on death like the Spanish master's famous painting of the *Dead Christ*.

Mr. Manes, who also paints palmetto-studded landscapes and tottering piles of wooden bowls, overlays his sometimes-prosaic subject matter with titles from myth, art history and literature, and it is not always clear if the references are illuminating or extraneous.

One of his piles of bowls is titled *Saint Sebastian*. Perhaps there is a parallel between the many images we know of the saint's crumpled body and the collapsing bowls held in place by on the perimeters of Mr. Manes' canvas. *The Beast in the Jungle* is a relatively well-known Henry James novella that can only have the most oblique reference to Mr. Manes' tangled wooded scene with an obscured brown patch in the background. Viewers have confidently identified this patch as a hunter, a tiger or a clump of dead leaves.

Mr. Manes favors a 104-by-78 inch vertical format that makes for striking, confrontational images. *The Tagus* shows rapids on the Iberian river, but the image

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has been tilted toward the viewer to create an unnatural angle that allows you to analyze the flow of water. The brushwork is extravagant without ever being flashy, just as in the several paintings of bowls, dripping glazes give substance to the surface without distracting from the image.

Although this is his first solo exhibition in Dallas, Mr. Manes has been showing for 25 years. His straightforward approach to his images combines with familiarity with his precedents to make for a satisfying round of picture making.

-Charles Dee Mitchell