

Amanda Burnham / Denominator

November 3 - December 10, 2008



Reception: November 6, 5pm - 7pm

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Labyrinth of Signs

by Benjamin Lima

Left. **Gulf**. 2007. 50 x 60 inches

Right. **Front Lines**. 2007. 34 x 50 inches

Cover. **Tote-um**. Detail. 2008. 8 x 11 inches

Amanda Burnham's work offers views of archetypal contemporary American landscapes, skillfully modulated with distinctions between color and monochrome; between abstraction and realistic detail; and between illusionistic perspective and flat, collaged surface. The control of all these different dimensions allows us to explore directly such symbolic aspects of these vernacular environments as remain hidden or implicit when we see only their surfaces, as in photographs.

Whether moving through a city, suburb, or exurb, a highway traveler will often encounter two different orders of signage. Glowing corporate brand logos coexist with more furtively produced but equally visible spray-can graffiti. Although produced by opposing social factions, strikingly, these two kinds of signs occupy the same register in Burnham's *Gulf* and *Front Lines*. Both are painted with an unnatural saturated palette that clearly derives from the lab and not from nature. The bright integrated brands of logo and graffiti muscle their way into the pictorial foreground, while the surrounding environment remains in the muted



ironic reality that an immaterial corporate logo actually has a longer lifetime than any given physical commercial building, which might be built and demolished as quickly as the economic cycle demands.

Here the lettering of both types of signage is carefully shaped and then abstracted so that it connotes its objects without carrying a precise denotation, showing us no particular brand, but instead the idea of a brand. In a parallel fashion, the physical elements of the landscape – large commercial buildings and chain-link fences – are rendered as nearly abstract. Buildings appear as simplified large blocks: the pair of cruciform towers in *Front Lines*, or in a panorama of interlocking shapes in *Gulf*. Fences, meanwhile, verge on being pure diagonal grids. In each case, we see an ambiguous flow between several different levels of things and their representations. The semi-abstract environment of letterforms, building blocks, and fence-grids comes to resemble a kind of three-dimensional diagram or plan, as much as it resembles a realistic view.

In some of the works, the ambiguity between work-as-object and work-as-image is emphasized by the application of cardboard panels to the surface of the painting. However, even within the pictorial window, any clear sense of a unified, readable space, and the viewer's mastery of it, is frustrated. The works depict a world that is labyrinthine and difficult to navigate. This labyrinthine aspect and the presence of the deliberately haphazard cardboard panels are tied together thematically. Both suggest a disaster scenario, in which the physical structure of the environment is blurring and disintegrating, and in which artworks such as these must be pieced together from the materials at hand (i.e. scrap-cardboard). Furthermore, the suggestion of a disaster also might be open on to an interpretation of the techniques of abstraction discussed above. These pictures show the viewpoint of someone desperately trying to escape, whose view of the surrounding environment is therefore a blurred or distracted one, so that its precise details are left unclear, leaving only the semi-abstracted diagrams, such as those we see in Burnham's work.

JULIO FINE ARTS GALLERY

Loyola College in Maryland
4501 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21210

Gallery Phone 410 617 2799

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Gallery Hours

Monday to Friday, 11am – 5pm

Sunday, 1pm – 4pm

Saturday, Closed

Gallery will be closed during all school holidays.

Location and Parking

The Julio Fine arts Gallery is in the College Center directly north of Jenkins lot and Francis X. Knott Humanities Center.

Pay parking is available in Jenkins lot on Bunn Drive and free parking is available on Cold Spring lane after 6pm.