



River Deep, Mountain High

Jacci Den Hartog Mines the Land

■ JACCI DEN HARTOG: "AN INVITATION TO RECLUSION." CHRISTOPHER GRIMES GALLERY, 916 COLORADO AVE., SANTA MONICA. (310) 587-3373. TUE.-SAT. 10 A.M.-6 P.M. THROUGH APRIL 27.

By Michael Darling

There will probably be a direct correlation between the willingness of viewers to let themselves drift into the reverie of Jacci Den Hartog's magical mountainscapes and their enjoyment of her exhibition, as any stiff resistance to the viscous pleasure of her sculptures will deaden their considerable impact. The accessibility of this dream world is almost immediate once one begins to survey the distinctive features of Den Hartog's sculptural landscapes at Christopher Grimes Gallery; each microcosmic environment dares viewers to immerse themselves in the lurching promontories, cool puddles, and gushing waterfalls of these wall-mounted constructions.

Most of the wall works feature craggy chunks of opaque white plaster that suggest staggered levels of steep mountainsides, over

which are poured exuberant amounts of clear polyurethane in a range of hues. The polyurethane alternately cascades from plaster cliffs, forms busy rivulets

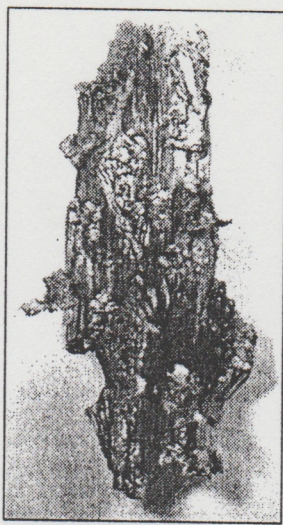
between tiny gorges, or puddles comfortably in scattered recessions.

Scale has a lot to do with the effectiveness of Den Hartog's mythical mounds. Each is roughly body-sized, allowing for an identification with the objects on equal terms, but one's body quickly becomes outsized when imagining the land forms as actual sites. Suddenly, the viewer is adrift in a Brobdingnagian world, hovering over vertiginous cataracts, and covering great distances with a couple shuffles of the feet.

The crisp, chilly veils of violet and blue polyurethane melting over cantilevered outcroppings of plaster in *Rising Before the Mist Has Risen* (1996) establishes both a palpable chromatic climate and a tone of unnatural fantasy. The plaster land forms move in and out of focus as billowy clouds or foot-steadying mountain trails, with the watery effusion linking every interpretation in a gush of sugary fluid. *Dwelling in Floating Jade Mountains* (1995) is a similarly comported tangle of geology and hydrology, although the mossy green polyurethane here makes long leaps from level to level, frozen into disturbing veils that suggest some kind of primordial slime. The play of robust and variegated surfaces against the inviting, calm recessions that lurk behind Den Hartog's rubbery pours makes for a stimulating visual hide-and-seek.

Compared to the drooling wondrousness of the aforementioned pieces, *Landscape in the Manner of Old Masters* (1996) seems like a retentive recluse, but this relatively simple range of jagged plaster peaks with a judicious coating of green polyurethane runoff is still enchanting. Hanging out into the gallery space at least a foot, and placed low enough that it requires some effort to see its underside, *Landscape* "floats" in the manner of a fairy tale isle, where the Bunyanesque viewer can easily glide around it and gain a variety of picturesque views.

Reflection Thru a Plum Blossom Mist (1995) is not nearly so subtle — its grand



Jacqi Den Hartog's *Dwelling in Floating Jade Mountains*

scale and gaudy purple hue command attention from the minute a viewer enters the gallery. Its baroque, broken double helix form pushes the landscape imagery almost beyond recognition, and the striped screens of lavender, blue, and greenish-yellow polyurethane are equally outside the conventions of nature. The hallucinogenic hyperbole of the work is its best quality, however, and it stands out as a highlight of this phase of Den Hartog's work.

Two pieces in the show, both placed on the floor and thematically linked to the rest of the works by their references to landscape, seem to contradict

and perhaps even challenge the escapist pleasures proffered elsewhere in the exhibition. In its outline and general massing, *Moving Mountain* (1995-96) has the same kind of tumbling mountainous form as many of the pieces, but its construction of multicolored polyurethane casts of Chinese vase stands disallows interpretive drift.

The physical and cultural specificity of the objects steers viewers toward some equally specific reading, but the objective is unclear. Does this pile of products insinuate a consumerist critique? Are the missing vases the dislocated subject? Is this a rumination on the commodification of Chinese culture? Do they invoke the labor of unrecognized workers? The answers to these questions are not forthcoming, and within the context of the imaginative and sensual pleasures of the wall-mounted works, the intimation of a political critique is disruptive, even unwanted.

Another misfit, *Invitation to Reclusion* (1996), also brings the world of commerce and commodities into the interpretation of the work; its triple stack of large resin-cast vase stands topped with a jade-green resin mountain looks more like a Pier One display than the handmade fictions that line the gallery walls. The resulting confusion threatens to dispel the transformative and guilt-free pleasure of the rest of the show, but the persuasive, perverse beauty of Den Hartog's main body of work is fortunately strong enough to fight off any such distractions.