



Abby Leigh: *Landscape for the Profoundly Myopic II*, 2007, pigment on linen, 60 by 120 inches; at Betty Cuningham.

Abby Leigh at Betty Cuningham

Abby Leigh's recent paintings and ink drawings (2005-07), brought together under the title "The Eye is the First Circle," cast Yayoi Kusama's obsessive infinity nets over the visionary abstraction of Arthur Dove. Fourteen landscapes, panoramic in format and aquatic in feel, ranged from microscopic detail to cosmological sweep. Leigh, a wide-eyed metaphysician, accrues evidence in her work for the transcendental oneness of nature described in Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1841 essay "Circle," the source for her show's title.

In one group of paintings, broad fingerlike and wavelike blue-green shapes are suspended between a white ground and a pattern of minute circles, bathing each composition in a milky haze. Spiraling below the dappled surface of *The Eye is the First Circle*, a large (60-by-120-inch) painting featured in the main gallery, marine-variety flora descend toward a central, light-filled abyss. Twenty-four untitled sumi ink and graphite drawings (2005-06), perfectly on Emersonian message, use concentric circles to suggest natural forms: from pods or pores to dilated pupils, rippling water, atomic blasts and the rings of Saturn. Enriched by expressive contrasts between sensuous, feathery strokes and precisely illustrational passages resembling spindly tentacles, several drawings veer away from the otherwise unwavering focus of the series, introducing asymmetry by means of a single diaphanous horizontal or vertical cutting a swath through the page.

Paintings titled "Inner Circle" (all 2006 or '07) embed monocular and molecular motifs in the sort of veinlike webs dominant in the drawings. Translucent as egg-

shells, these works are composed in expansive, parabolic curves of green and white, configurations that evoke the Milky Way. A catalogue essay by Thomas Miccilli explains how Leigh uses organic, hand-ground pigments in a process bringing full circle, so to speak, the show's trope: an imaginary documentation of nature's DNA, infinitesimally varied in its formal and material structure.

Equating visual surfeit with disorientation, *Landscape for the Profoundly Myopic II* approximates the experience of being a nearsighted person without corrective goggles in an underwater world. It features a plantlike monolith infiltrated by Leigh's signature filigree, with a deliberate layering of splashes, shapes and glazing, and contours blurred in a crossfire of energetic diagonals. Small-scale and repeating forms generate a feeling of excessive intimacy, placing us in the close-up position of the artist at work. A riot of formlessness and disunity, the work might well herald myopia as a condition to be cultivated by 21st-century artist-visionaries.

—Susan Rosenberg