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AROUND THE GALLERIES

Merging Styles with Intensity

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Kent Williams at Merry Karnowsky Gallery

"Amalgam" is the name of **Kent Williams'** show at Merry Karnowsky, the title of one of the paintings in it and an apt term to describe the artist's syncretic style. An instructor at Art Center College of Design, and before that at CalArts, Williams has a well-skilled hand and a roving, hungry eye. He paints with compelling intensity and theatricality, even when overreaching. In the title painting, a nude man sits with arms upraised behind his head, as if held captive. A thick snake vanishes into his chest. A trio of dopey cats rendered in Japanese comic-book style hangs out along the bottom edge of the panel, while a human couple above appears lifted from a Japanese woodblock print. Faint figures haunt the margins, along with vaguely scrawled words.



Amalgam by Kent Williams. Courtesy Merry Karnowsky Gallery.

Williams sets the figure in shallow, stage-like space and immerses his lower body in a dense wash of blood-red paint. As in many of these recent works, the narrative remains ambiguous, but undercurrents of violence, power and sexuality run strong. A large selection of drawings, many of them preparatory to the paintings, shows Williams' debt to Egon Schiele. The images of single figures, some in slightly contorted poses, carry an erotic charge, their firmly incised lines taut with energy. Williams' show also features a lush, diaphanous landscape, built up in oil, encaustic and resin, and several portraits where character, refreshingly, provides its own drama and mystery, without the need for cloying special effects.

Merry Karnowsky Gallery, 170 S. La Brea Ave., (323) 933-4408, through Sept. 9.
Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.mkgallery.com

For further information please contact the gallery.