

JULIA STOOPS

By Sue Taylor April 2, 2015 12:29pm



Julia Stoops: *Pleiades*, 2014, ink, acrylic paint and inkjet prints on illustration board mounted on Sintra, 16 by 12 inches; at Upfor.

Over the past two decades, Julia Stoops has forged a multi-faceted career in [Portland](#), founding a design studio, teaching art, writing fiction and showing her paintings at various venues around the city. Her resume includes an international background (New Zealand, Australia, Japan) and academic degrees in philosophy and linguistics as well as in art. Forty-six new paintings (all 2014) made up her first exhibition at [Upfor](#), charging the gallery with eye-popping color.

In these pictures, each 16 by 12 inches, Stoops conjures galaxies of flying orbs, rings, saucers and enigmatic vessels. Abstract passages of apparently spontaneous brushstrokes and splashes coexist with illusionistically rendered motifs, some of them computer-generated, to create a heterogeneous universe alive with engaging pictorial incident. Skeins of drizzled white or pale-blue acrylic paint suggest planetary orbits or the trails of vanished comets, while warped grids and floating spheres, diagrammed by longitude and latitude lines, map a visionary space-time continuum. Helixes, vortices and torrents of colored dots animate the cosmos Stoops creates.

These are richly layered compositions, generated with mixed mediums on paper mounted on board. At a gallery talk, the artist described her pleasure in using inks extracted from discontinued printer cartridges and repurposed papers she calls “starts”—sheets previously taped down to protect her work surface. Already decorated with casual brush-wipes, spills and occasional pen notations, the starts give rise to intriguing palimpsests of information. The blank page, notorious intimidator of artists and writers, is vitiated in this process, which preserves evidence, barely discernible in the finished paintings, of distracted moments in the studio: a column of addition, e-mail addresses jotted down in haste, a note-to-self about a local curator and catalogue. It is an effective structural strategy for Stoops, who superimposes on this random, quotidian foundation her fantastical scenes requiring imaginative invention and control.

Titles like *Wayfarer*, *Locomotion* and *Traveling Quatrefoil with Aura* underscore the sense of a journey, established by the reappearances, in several paintings, of certain objects that might be space probes. The recurring red orb with rolling-pin-like handles and the quatrefoil-type form comprised of two intersecting disks read as protagonists on an exploratory adventure. In *Pleiades*, the quatrefoil sails past the eponymous star cluster, seven gray spheres with white halos radiating liquid pink; elsewhere the intrepid four-lobed voyager eludes exploding raspberry-colored asteroids and olive-green tori tumbling through space.

By hanging the paintings in a single row around all four walls of the gallery, Stoops encouraged the perambulating viewer to identify with her cosmic pilgrims. She titled her exhibition “46 Views,” conjuring other episodic visual travelogues such as Hokusai’s series “Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji” in the 19th century or Ed Ruscha’s *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* in the 20th. In this case, the trip is purely metaphorical. Fraught with potential collisions, strange encounters and lost coordinates, it represents, I think, an intrapsychic journey heralding untold discoveries.

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