

ACME.

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Los Angeles Times

Review: Amy Adler at play with forms at once concrete and abstract

December 12, 2014 | By Sharon Mizota



Amy Adler's large drawings of playground equipment at ACME capture a vocabulary of rounded forms — ladders, bridges, railings, slides — familiar from parks and schools throughout the Southland and beyond.

But by depicting the structures deserted, at night, the images occupy an odd, in-between state: Without the children, the playground becomes sculpture. As such, the drawings simultaneously refer to real life — they are based on Adler's location photographs for a film — and an underlying language of abstraction.

Executed in jewel-toned oil pastels on black canvas grounds, Adler's images are realistic in that they capture the dimensionality of the forms, their shadows, even the textures of brick, foliage and sand that surround them.

But all the shapes have a uniform quality, smooth and idealized, like children's book illustrations. A wall of ivy becomes a wallpaper-like pattern. A grid of rubber flooring is too perfect and regular. It's as if the surrounding environment has been tamed to the orderly logic of the structures.

Within this disciplined rubric, the interchangeable pieces of the playground function in much the same way as primary-colored squares and black grids did for artists like Mondrian. They form a limited vocabulary from which endless permutations can be constructed.

In this light, the generic parts don't seem so oppressively monotonous and safe. They are, after all, an architecture for the imagination.

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