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Jennifer Steinkamp: Contemporary Art's Madame Curie

By Shana Nys Dambrot | February 23, 2011

Video artist Jennifer Steinkamp's decades-long love affair with digital art is still as passionate as ever. Best known for gently swaying curtains of flowering vines, her large-scale video installations use pixels like a pointillist deploys pigment, creating immense images from millions of microbe-size dabs of color. The impact of her work is in large part due to her manipulation of CGI code simulating the organic movement of explosions, breezes, ocean tides, and the human body.

As *Madame Curie I*, the centerpiece of her current installation at LA's ACME., amply demonstrates, the surreal, poetic magic of those billowing walls of flowers never gets old, no matter how many times she works a variant. The dreamlike quality of a supersaturated, clearly artificial yet utterly convincing replication of nature is undeniably hypnotic. Other work, such as *Premature 9* (also included in the exhibition), 2004's acclaimed installation *The Wreck of the Dumaru*, and a recent, more geometrical skyscraper projection speak to the true breadth of her aesthetic vocabulary. *Dumaru* filled a vast hall with a seasick carnival ride based on the destructive power of high ocean waves, and *Premature*'s imagery seems almost intestinal in its dark abstraction. Although her other series are indeed expertly crafted and affecting both physically and emotionally, it's easy to see why she returns again and again to drink from the flower-well. Unlike her other more ambiguous and conceptually profound series, the flowers simply sooth the soul.

Jennifer Steinkamp's newest exhibition is on view through March 12 at ACME. in Los Angeles.

