

## ACME.

6150 WILSHIRE BLVD., SPACES 1 & 2  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90048  
T 323.857.5942 F 323.857.5864  
WWW.ACMELOSANGELES.COM

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# Los Angeles Times

## Jennifer Steinkamp at ACME.

By David Pagel | October 16, 2009



Jennifer Steinkamp's five new pieces at ACME are so individually absorbing that a lot of time can go by before you notice the magnitude of her achievement. She almost single-handedly transforms the medium in which she works — projected digital imagery — from a one-at-a-time, one-after-another setup into an all-at-once immersion in a stimulating environment that leaves you with more freedom than you came in with.

I love it when that happens.

Here's how Steinkamp, who has been exhibiting projected imagery for more than 20 years, makes it work: She treats each of her meticulously engineered animations as if it were a painting.

Not because of what it's made of. There's no mistaking Steinkamp's gorgeously composed constellations of shining light as oils on canvas.

And not because of what it depicts. The swirling leaves, budding blossoms, undulating trees and jiggling squiggles in her pulsating pictures never pretend to be anything other than what they are: super-sophisticated computer animations.

Steinkamp's pieces instead function as paintings because of the ways they get visitors to interact

with them.

One of the best things about paintings is that you can look at a roomful of them in any order whatsoever, skipping and jumping back-and-forth among as many or as few as quickly or as languorously as you like, for as long as you want and as intensely or as informally as it suits you.

One of the worst things about conventional video projections is that they don't play well with others. In general, each demands that you pay exclusive attention to it, from start to finish, before going on to the next one.

Steinkamp's floor-to-ceiling fields of dancing light throw their lot in with the every-which-way simultaneity of a roomful of paintings. In the first darkened gallery, four projections on each of the four walls make you feel as though you have stepped into a high-tech house of mirrors. It's fascinating, befuddling and inspiring to try to make sense of the rhythms, patterns and sequences that take shape between and among "Orbit #2," "Orbit #3," "Orbit #4" and "Orbit #5."

Sometimes symmetry happens, as parts of each of the approximately four-minute-long animations pair up with one another. At others, chaos reigns, especially when each of the four projections seems to be marching to its own beat.

What happens between these extremes is endlessly fascinating, particularly when standing in the first gallery and viewing the abstract projection, "Sharpie #4," in an adjacent gallery. Time and space collapse and expand as you zero in on details, scan the rooms swiftly or sit back, space out and take in an overall view of the whole.

Every once in awhile, serenity is thrilling.