

JANE PARK WELLS

May 11 – June 15, 2002 at Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica

By *Mat Gleason*



"Rhyme or Reason #8", 2002, mixed media on shaped wood, each 23 x 23 x 4 1/2".



"Rhyme or Reason #13", 2002, mixed media on shaped wood, each 23 x 23 x 4 1/2".



"Rhyme or Reason #7, 21, 11", 2002, mixed media on shaped wood panels, each 23 x 23 x 4 1/2".



"Rhyme or Reason" series, 2002, north wall installation, mixed media on shaped wood, each 23 x 23 x 4 1/2".

A visit to the studio of artist Jane Park Wells presents a conundrum for a journalist. One of the primary rules of the profession is to only report the news, to never make the news. Wells has different ideas for anyone viewing her recent work, their employment history be damned.

Wells makes interactive part. That is not a buzz word for high tech. This is physical abstract painting, pigment built up on panel, patterns repeated within grids. Call it low-tech. Call it quite successful.

In her use of the square, the artist privileges no linear narrative (a vertical representing a fundamental anthropomorphic portrait, a horizontal intuitively reading as landscape). But she hardly stops there. The square is but a panel in a larger grid of squares. The interactive part of her art begins about here. The squares within the grids are up for grabs—well at least up for viewers to handle them, to sort them within the grid, and to rotate each individual panel.

The title of her exhibition is Rhyme or Reason. The origin of that phrase is to describe something not making sense in either the rational or poetic sphere. A Western concept? Try again – try Zen. Wells asks us what an author. By association, then, what is an artist? Who is the artist? Who is the viewer? What is the role of the viewer? Many other questions or, perhaps, koans, are implied.

One is always free to observe the work of Wells, though, and not participate. The work can remain static and still be a pleasant visual experience. In this regard, Rhyme or Reason works as an exhibit for those with backgrounds in journalism, as well as purists, traditionalists, the squeamish and those who can accept things the way they are, still believe in authorship, or are unaware of the freedom to which they are actually entitled.

Despite the freedom of placement granted to viewers, the surfaces of these panels have been completed and are not subject to alteration. The artists repeats a ribbonlike pattern on a variety of backgrounds, in various shades of muted colors, often approximating a wisp, only to be reinforced by a repeat of the same brushstroke—like curl. Referencing the truism that points of departure are usually destinations as well, the artist cleverly renders a reinforcement of the show's theme: the questioning of authorship need not discourage play, nor contemplation.

Not satisfied to stick with the grid and other conventional formal devices,

the artist has employed curved panels to give her interactive wall piece a sculptural presence. The zen effect is here again, with the surface itself rolling and curving out, challenging assumptions of the picture as an illusionary space or window, all the while being freed from the artist's ego that tends to spout such theoretical navel-gazing drivel.

A ringing echo of John Cage's aesthetic example resonates after taking in Rhyme or Reason. Randomness, the mature sibling of Chaos, has a rhyme as structured as the universe and a reason as complex as a personality. Wells trusts us as viewers to participate in her vision, to exonerate her composition and to placate her indecision. It takes a triumph of the non-Will.