



VISUAL ARTS | ART REVIEW

# There's bliss beyond horizon in Susan Maakestad's joyous 'White Out'



Susan Maakestad, "White Out," oil on canvas, 36 by 42 inches, 2015. From "White Out " at Circuitous Succession Gallery.

*By Fredric Koeppl, Special to The Commercial Appeal*

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I mentioned last week in this space that as a viewer and reviewer of art, I have been repeatedly awestruck by the ability of artists to imbue ordinary objects with extraordinary presence when the materials at hand are, of course, merely a flat surface and a handful of pigments and a brush or a pen and jar of ink or a wand of charcoal. I feel equally as transfixed by the proficiency that allows artists to create a sense of spaciousness, of depth and dimension in their pictures that goes beyond the mere rules of geometrical perspective to an expansiveness that defies the limitations of a square or rectangle of canvas or paper.

In "White Out," her first gallery exhibition since 2010, Susan Maakestad conveys exactly those qualities, as she moves ever closer to complete abstraction in her oil-on-canvas paintings that portray the wide open spaces of the American landscape. Here, we are in a realm that transcends the locality of suburban sidewalks, shopping mall parking lots and highway interchanges for a recognition of the universality of the intricate balance between meditative stasis and urgent forward thrust. The show will be displayed through May 6 at Circuitous Succession Gallery.

Those depopulated sidewalks, parking lots and interchanges, along with airport runways and endless highways and their straight lines, curves and stripes, appeared in minimal form in [Maakestad's earlier work](#), brushed in and lit by skies of uncanny hue. One discerned in those fairly small pieces a feeling of existential dread; it's awfully quiet and lonely out there where the curbs end and the highway runs out between low hills and the runway seems to drop off the edge of the world. The parking lots, devoid of cars and people, distinguished by the strict repetition of their yellow markings, seemed not just abandoned but post-apocalyptic.

The paintings in "White Out," however, while more abstract, offer

more sense of sway and movement, of a largeness of spirit that approaches joy. Most of these recent works occur in the artist's "White Out" series, and it's impossible not to get the point: That there exists a numinous horizon where color goes blank, where the soul dissolves into ether, where the great, beckoning yonder encompasses all our motion and desire. The unrepressed scope and all-embracing nature of such pieces as "White Out 13" and "White Out 10" — or any of the other numbers — are wonderful to contemplate, especially as revealed in canvas rectangles that measure 30-by-42-inches.

While the work in this exhibition still hints at notions of highways or runways, desert vistas or the immensity of canyons and falling water, the primary passages are forward and skyward into the bright light of day or shadowed twilight. On the other hand, paradoxically, in the 14-by-20-inch "#34 Wanderlust," an arbitrary curving pink line seems to lead us into the heart of a swirling maelstrom from which we will, gratefully, never emerge. It's all about oblivion.

Also showing at Circuitous Succession, in the front room, is "Pizza Witch Uprising," a collection of 10 wildly uninhibited mixed-media collage works by Sheri Bancroft, a tribute to the artist's late father that incorporates pieces of his business correspondence, spreadsheets, calendars, church bulletins and notes on yellow legal pads. The effect is childlike, exuberant, giddy, witty and touching.

**Susan Maakestad, 'White Out'**

**Sheri Bancroft, 'Pizza Witch Uprising'**

Through May 6 at Circuitous Succession Gallery, 500 S. Second. Call 901-229-1041, or visit [circuitoussuccession.com](http://circuitoussuccession.com).

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