

David Solomon, Jay Etkin Gallery, 703 Camino de la Familia, 983-8511; through April 24

There is something compelling in the work of David Solomon, owner and director of Bang! Gallery, that appeals to the part of me that gravitates toward the mystical. Solomon's work at Jay Etkin Gallery has a lot to offer those who want to puzzle out life's mysteries and discover hidden meanings, even if those meanings are ultimately subjective. This may seem a strange response to what are, on the surface, simply rendered oil paintings and works on paper. If I had to compare them to anyone else's work, the paintings of Agnes Pelton, a member of the Transcendental Painting Group of the 1930s and '40s, come immediately to mind — but in some regards, Solomon's work is more abstract and less refined than Pelton's.

The feeling in Solomon's *In Person* is one of being on the verge of momentous discovery or standing before a great mystery, which relates to the experience of the viewer when looking at art. In this painting, a shadowy figure looms in the foreground in front of a great eye — perhaps the eye of God. The figure seems compelled to be there, as though drawn by some force other than his own volition. It is a small painting, part of a series of works that incorporate imagery resembling life on a cellular level. Even the eye in *In Person* seems like the nucleus of a cell, suggesting that there are worlds within worlds. I'm reminded of the final scene of Jack Arnold's 1957 film *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, in which the title character, realizing his condition will not change, resigns himself, not without a sense of wonder, to his fate. Had we been treated to the shrinking man's new view of the world, it might have resembled a painting by Solomon.

Jay Etkin Gallery deals in contemporary as well as ethnographic art. The front end of the vast space is given over to Solomon's work, and there is little in the way of antique ethnographic art to cramp the viewing experience. Some galleries that deal with both ethnographic art or antiquities and contemporary works are intimidating, because you feel as if you might knock something over if you breathe. Not so here.

Like other Railyard galleries, Jay Etkin allows for plenty of natural light and has an open and contemporary feel. This works to Solomon's advantage, because you can step away from the paintings far enough to see them as a series and note how they relate — and they do: eye, seed, and crescent-moon motifs run throughout the artist's work. There are three distinct series on view here: 36-by-30-inch paintings on aluminum; 10-by-12-inch paintings, also on aluminum; and a series of ink drawings on paper. The natural light shows the paintings to good effect. Their colors are rich and vibrant.

Solomon, judging by the title of at least one painting, draws some inspiration from the tarot. His *Four of Rods* does not appear to contain any explicit tarot imagery, but the reference is there. I could say, "Make of it what you will," but that would be wrong. It's not what you make of these paintings so much as what they evoke within you. *In Person* may remind those familiar with tarot imagery of the seven of chalice. You have come to a point in your journey where you must make a choice. Choose wisely and see the show.

— Michael Abatemarco



David Solomon: *In Person*, oil on aluminum, 12 x 10 inches



Spirit on Fire, oil on aluminum, 12 x 10 inches