



Inka Essenhigh, *Star Maker*, 2014, oil on paper, 51¼" x 40".



Julio Valdez, *Celia*, 2014, oil on paper, 10" x 10".

INKA ESSENHIGH

JACOB LEWIS
OCTOBER 17 - NOVEMBER 15

In this show, poetically titled "Comet Dust & Crystal Shards," Inka Essenhigh's paintings invoked a childlike enchantment—capable even of melting the hearts of those not previously drawn to her work. Here was the planet as seen through an idealized lens, where humans live in such harmony with nature that it's hard to tell the natural world from the imagined one. Essenhigh's female spirits were set in panoramas of vine-covered earth and starry skies at the dawn, or happy twilight, of time.

What kept viewers teetering in the present was the just-painted freshness of Essenhigh's gestures on paper: an active, breathing surface that allows the artist no second chance. Presented in diptych and triptych format, the division of images by space and framing grounded the figures in geometry while lending substance and window-like distance to supernatural events.

City Blossom (2014) is dominated by an undulating hydra-like shape that morphs into leopards, flowers, and sprites, its sinuous tentacles taking over an urban canyon lined with blank high-rises, while a couple of human onlookers linger in the background and undefined organic shapes (leaves? birds? nuclei?) swirl in the air. Despite hovering on the brink of being cloying or cartoonlike, these new works maintained their artistic edge while offering just the right dose of magic.

CAROL DIEHL

JULIO VALDEZ

NOVEMBER 15

Born in the Dominican Republic, Valdez grew up studying art in Santo Domingo. In his show "Para Sofía" (2014), he examined the relationship between the artist and the viewer, sharing the blue and green tones of his work. The artist swirls his colors to create a hallucinatory, ever-changing form.

Though water is a recurring theme in all of the works, Valdez's focus is on the aquatic realm. In *Curiosos I* (2014), he depicts a green, undulating surface, with a couple of green leaves and a couple of fish that swirl in the water. In *Curiosos II* (2014), he depicts a man's shadow and a man's face, with a couple of octopuses and a couple of fish that swirl in the water.

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