

Flora Natapoff's 'industrial landscapes'

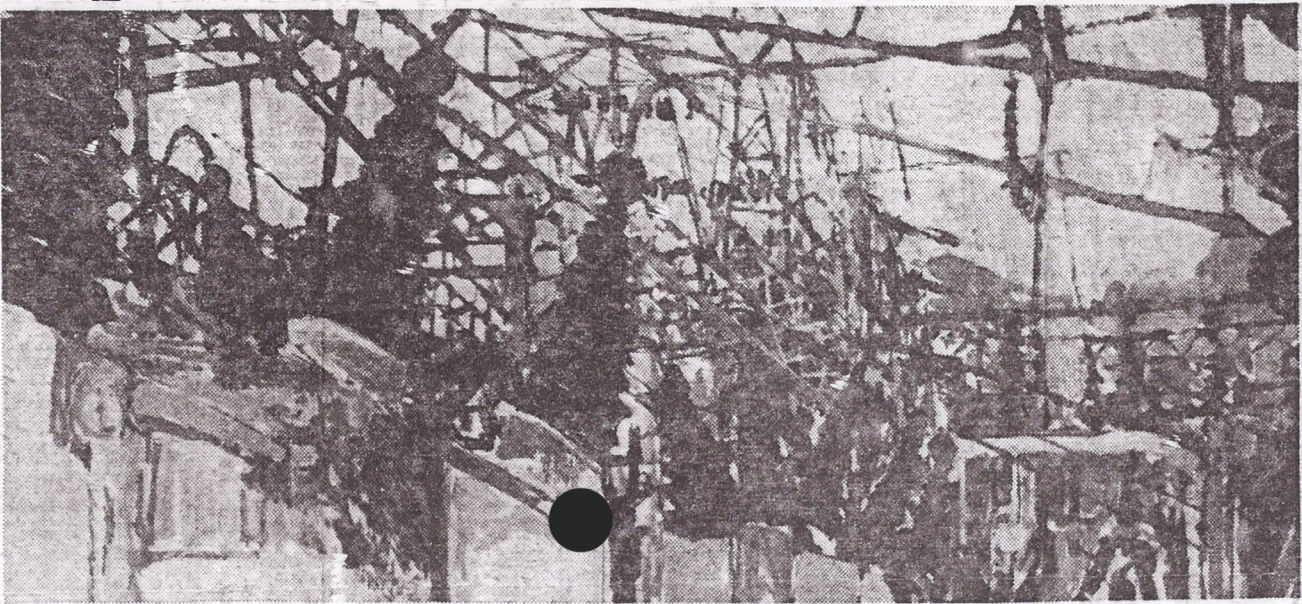
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By Robert Taylor
Globe Staff

Flora Natapoff's work at the Marcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend Gallery this month does for the American industrial landscape what the baroque spiral did for the nude.

In fact, her pictures, which both describe and evoke a world of giant cranes and factory chimneys and conveyor belts of coal hods as carefully spaced as a file of Degas jockeys waiting in the paddock, are charged by a baroque energy. Nothing could be more remote from the ascetic, purist celebration of the American industrial environment that we encounter, say, in Charles Sheeler. For Sheeler is at some pains to conceal the sensuous character of his materials; he would rather offer the literal photographic fact that is the blast furnace rather than admit that his representation of a blast furnace consists of paint, canvas and stretcher.

Technically, Flora Natapoff's paintings are assembled — the jagged edges of paper scraps, the flashing calligraphy of the pastel crayon, the intense shifts of acrylic — but while these elements are so well-integrated that it takes awhile to realize that one is looking at mixed media, she doesn't deny her materials. On the contrary, she revels in them. Instead of the illustration of the factory that Sheeler produces with his photographic eye, Natapoff conveys the hectic forces that make the factory hum.



"Energy," a collage of rag paper, acrylic and pastel from the Flora Natapoff exhibition at 7 Newbury st.

Movement, multiplicity, method, all these she understands. A characteristic strategy is the choice of seemingly eccentric angles of vision, looking upward or away toward a tangle of girders, catching the combination of balance and a random placement of forms. Known formally as "occult" balance, this seesaw of angles and spaces lends Natapoff's pictures a brilliant dramatic power. The tilt of a floor line, the off-center approach to form, the tensions attained by the passages of torn paper which stress the picture's surfaces against the deep illusionary spaces of the painted interiors, possess a turbulent vitality.

The spaces of the gallery are not right, however, for Natapoff's collage pictures. In general, they demand more viewing distance. The smaller pictures, though, in black, blue-black and white acrylic, which have a far more restrictive range and which alter the emotional key from the magnetism of dark satanic mills to the phantasmal loneliness of the industrial landscape, are admirably served. None of the paintings are dated, but one should imagine the drift of the work is toward a kind of geometric abstraction with larger forms. A technical coda: working with the Fogg Museum's Conservation department, the artist has developed a way to keep the paper from buckling and so has eliminated the intrusions of glass and frame. You can clean the picture with a feather-duster. Which is more than can be said for a baroque ceiling.

FLORA NATAPOFF, collages and drawings, Marcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend, 7 Newbury st., through Oct. 1.