

A radiant 'Renaissance' Exhibit stresses pure form and color

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Leonardo da Vinci coined the painting term "sfumato" to refer to the blurring of usually sharp **GALLERIES** outlines to create a sense of depth. It was one of several techniques that contributed to the idealized realism — the spaciousness, the gorgeously described bodies — of Renaissance painting.

Photographer Bill Armstrong borrows images from the Renaissance in his exhibit at Gallery Kayafas, and, blurring the edges, vaults them into the realm of contemporary art. Separating out individual figures, he re-creates them in paper cutouts, which he lays on brightly toned grounds. Then he opens his lens as wide as he can and shoots a lengthy exposure.

The radiant results are the work of a master colorist. Red pulses against blue; turquoise throbs against plum. Because the figures blur, they move toward abstraction. We can't read their expressions, but we can read their postures. "Renaissance 1014" sets a whitish figure against a serene, teal ground. The man might be Christ removed from the cross, falling backward, arms open, evoking surrender. The themes are typical of the Renaissance, but the stories are gone in this distillation to pure form and color.

Armstrong has a second body of work, based on obscure erotic engravings from the Renaissance called "I Modi," a brief, Italian Kama Sutra. Each features a couple. Armstrong gives each figure in the pair a different tone. Up close, they're a fuzz of colors knotted together. From a distance, it's easier to make out the twining of limbs. Still, abstracted and blurry, the erotic charge has drained from them. Straddling the line between abstraction and figuration, Armstrong's work teases the viewer's eye, refusing to settle on one or the other.

Daniel Ranalli, who teaches at Boston University, followed a philosophy class for a term, photographing their scribbles. He also visited other classrooms. Ranalli's sharp and strangely mystical digitally montaged photographs of chalkboards are also at Gallery Kayafas.

Ranalli has a fascination with ephemeral marks; in the past, he has shot patterns in the sand. His chalkboards reveal more visual information than I could have imagined. Erasures evoke the marks of a paintbrush. Bits of scrawl chatter and squirm. Complete words or equations grab attention like magnets. Then there's the surprising element of color — who knew there were so many shades of green and gray? Ranalli has even altered one to look gold. In all, these works consider space, mark-making, and color in a distinctly painterly manner.

In "Big Bang — Yin Yang," two green boards hover in an infinite space created by a blackboard, scribbled with formulae, erasures, and stray marks — a kind of intellectual galaxy. The words "big bang" appear on one of the green boards. The other one features a parsing of Eastern philosophy, including a drawing of yin and yang. Ranalli pairs vastly different realms of knowledge, and they fit together.



: Bill Armstrong's "Renaissance 1014." Below: Daniel Ranalli's "This That."

