



MANNY SILVERMAN GALLERY

BIG AND JUICY: Norman Bluhm's "Poseidon," at Manny Silverman Gallery, links visual and oral gratification.

So luscious and lascivious

By DAVID PAGEL
Special to The Times

Ever since Surrealism introduced psychoanalytic concepts into art, expressionist abstraction has been burdened with the

responsibility of exorcising the demons of the painters who made it. **Norman Bluhm's** big, juicy canvases fly in the face of this Freudian fixation on trauma by putting the pleasure principle front and center. At the Manny Silverman Gallery, five exuberant oils on canvas and four joyously messy works on paper by Bluhm (1921-99) rank among the

most libidinous to have come out of New York in the last 50 years.

All were made between 1977 and 1989. Each takes your eyes on a roller-coaster ride with more twists and turns than a writhing serpent and enough splashes and puddles of lusciously colored pigment to convince you that it was as much fun to make as it is to see.

"Mermaid's Delight," "Poseidon" and "Aegean Angel" link visual and oral gratification in their quasi-cartoon cascades of liquid deliciousness. Swollen blobs of supersaturated pastels cavort with whiplash doodles. Loosely composed around mouth-like openings, these paintings make the Rolling Stones' tongue-and-lips logo look prim and proper, no match for their over-the-top embrace of giddy lasciviousness.

The pleasures that Bluhm's paintings embody have more in common with walks on the wild side than with walks in the park. "Byzantine Angel" and "Laredo Lady" churn with turbulent verve. Their lipstick tints and velvety blacks hit you in the gut before your mind knows what to think.

Bluhm's works on paper are somewhat more intimate but no less intense. Like his big paintings, they lay the painter's handiwork bare without diminishing its sexy mystery.

Manny Silverman Gallery, 619 N. Almont Drive, (310) 659-8256, through July 7. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.artnet.com/gallery/986/mannysilverman-gallery.html