

Culture Monster

Art review: Rowan Wood at Steve Turner Contemporary

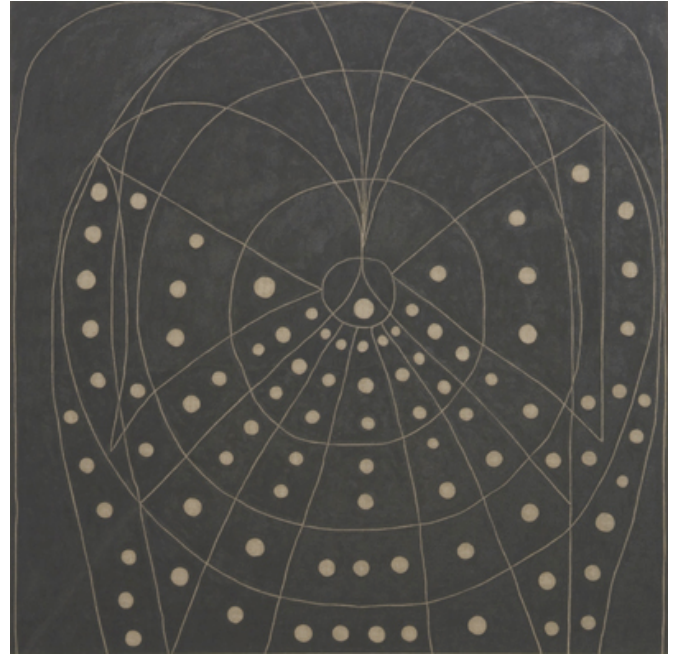
May 6, 2010 | 9:00 pm

Debut shows of artists fresh out of school are both a blessing and a curse. They keep the audience and the relentlessly hungry market fed with new possibility and new product but only rarely deliver more than a sense of promise. Promise is exciting, to be sure, but it's predicated as much on what's not there as on what is. Presence tends to be more fulfilling.



Rowan Wood earned his undergraduate degree from UCLA last year. While not a kid (he's in his early 30s), he still appears to have one foot in the classroom. His first solo show, at [Steve Turner Contemporary](#), presents work from two series, each spun from a thin concept that could easily have been a student assignment. The first, and weaker of the two, feels like an exercise in stylistic ventriloquism. In each of six canvases on view (the numbered titles indicate a series of at least a dozen), Wood reinterprets a basic image of circles and lozenge shapes against a solid ground. One is a crisp, classic, black and white geometric abstraction. Another substitutes pictographic bones and scribbles for the rounded shapes, mimicking a kind of sanitized street art. In another, the shapes morph into generalized emerald blobs, dull cousins to the abstractions of Monique Prieto. The "Bubble Solution" paintings offer a range of neatly formulated responses, but to a contrived — and not very problematic — problem.

Wood's "Copy" series has no more of a conceptual backbone but is more compelling visually. The paintings are variants of a single drawing (not shown) that has "special significance" to the artist. In black on white or raw linen, Wood conjures a spidery shape of concentric circles, arches and dots, diagrammatic but provisional. There is a fragility to the images, something tender and searching that appeals, and gives this debut show its redeeming sense of promise.



– Leah Ollman

Steve Turner Contemporary, 6026 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 931-3721, through May 22. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Images: "Bubble Solution 08," 2010 and "Copy 12," 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Steve Turner Contemporary.