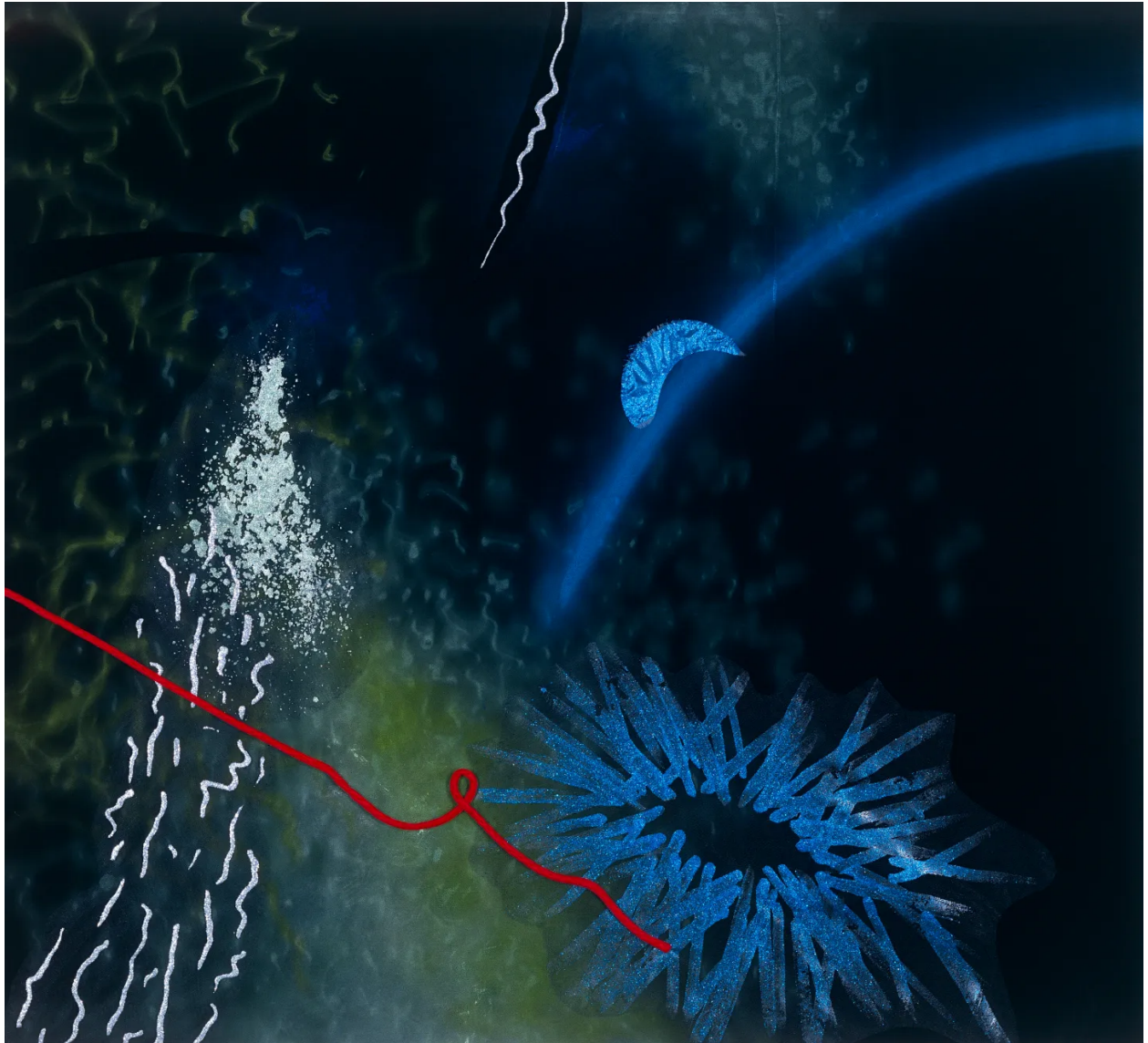


parrasch heijnen

# art and cake

*A Contemporary Art Magazine with a Focus on the Los Angeles Art Scene*



*Peter Alexander, Palolo, Catalina Series #5, 1984, Mixed-media collage on velvet, 48 x 53 in. Lent from The Estate of Peter Alexander, © The Estate of Peter Alexander.*

## **Echoes of Perception: Peter Alexander and California Impressionism**

1326 S. Boyle Avenue | Los Angeles, CA, 90023 | +1 323.943.9373 | [www.parraschheijnen.com](http://www.parraschheijnen.com)

Written by Liz Goldner

Artist Peter Alexander (1939-2020) was a seminal presence in the California Light and Space art movement — the 1960s to 70s style focusing on the impact of light on geometric forms, and on the sensory experiences of the artwork.

Light and Space artists were known for the “Finish Fetish” technique (painstakingly achieved pristine finishes) in their works. They achieved these finishes by employing technologies of the SoCal based aerospace industry, and by using materials as glass, neon, fluorescent lights, resin and acrylic.

Among Alexander’s Light and Space pieces is his *Violet Block Wedge* (1968), a luminous sculpture mirroring the night sky. He also admired and was inspired by early 20<sup>th</sup> century California Impressionism — a movement emphasizing illustration of light and color through broad brush strokes. He was particularly enamored with early California artists Elsie Palmer Payne, Hanson Duvall Puthuff and Granville Redmond. Puthuff’s *Mystical Hills*, (circa 1922), a plein air painting in this show is a landscape infused with Southern California light and scintillating color.

As Alexander evolved as an artist, he searched for new methods to depict light, color and perception in his artwork, while experimenting with various materials. By mid-career, he was engaging in a multifaceted approach to his work, becoming known for his semi-transparent cubes, wedges and bar-shaped volumes, cast from tinted resin, and for his landscape paintings, drawings and prints on canvas, paper and even on velvet. Mining his love and understanding of Impressionism, he began creating canvasses of sun-drenched days and mystery-filled nights.

Alexander was enamored with velvet, employing it to illustrate the density of the ocean on dark nights. While velvet was considered a “kitsch” material for artmaking, Alexander discovered that it approximates the blackness of moonless nights that he experienced on fishing boats. He explained, “I was up on the top deck looking out into the blackness when they shined a bright light down into the water to attract the squid. The squid moved into the light and underneath them was a school of glistening pink fish, and deeper still were sharks, who were swimming up to get the squid. The water was phosphorescing...and I knew right away what I wanted to do with the velvets, because of the blackness.” His *Palolo, Catalina Series # 5*, (1984) a mixed media collage on velvet, is an abstract painting of glistening fish within the phosphorescent ocean.

One admirer of his work is Kim Kanatani, director of the Langson Institute and Museum of California Art in Irvine. In 2019, she invited Alexander to curate an exhibition of California Impressionism from the museum’s collection. He soon began identifying works that extol the magnificent light, color and space of our state, as these aspects had a strong influence on his own artistic practice. Yet Alexander died within a year of embarking on this project.

To carry out his commitment to the project, Kanatani engaged five people, plus herself, all associated with Alexander’s art, to curate the exhibition as a dialogue between California Impressionism and Alexander’s work. The curators are Kevin Appel, professor and chair of Art, UC Irvine and Langson IMCA interim associate director; Julianne Gavino, former assistant curator, Langson IMCA; Kim Kanatani, Curt Klebaum, consulting curator; Claudia Parducci, artist and trustee of the Peter Alexander Art Estate; and Bruce Richards, artist.

The exhibition *Echoes of Perception* contains 14 Impressionist works from Langson IMCA’s collection, along with 11 Alexander resin sculptures, canvases, works on paper, and one painting on velvet. While the pieces, created from 1896 to 2020, display a variety of art styles, they

demonstrate how various artists have presented California light, color and space over more than a century.

The exhibition encourages visitors to experience the evolution of light as it proceeds from dawn to dusk to the darkness of night. The show also provides examples of the diverse influences and inspirations of pioneering artist Alexander, along with dialogues of his work with Impressionist paintings.

James Swinnerton's *Sunset in Monument Valley* (c. 1928), an orange-tinged painting of Monument Valley is echoed by Alexander's *1/24/20 Pink Orange Block* (2020), a sculpture made from urethane. The colors and shapes of Alexander's piece echo those of Swinnerton's, while both artworks fade in color as they reach their apexes, representing the transition of light during a sunset.

Granville Redmond's oil, *Untitled – Moonlight Marsh Scene* (early 20th century), a dreamy, romantic vision of the night-time deep blue sky meeting the ocean, is illuminated by shafts of light, with mountains in the background. The painting is echoed by several Alexander works, including his *Palolo, Catalina Series #5* (described above), and *Cloverfield I* (1988) of oil, wax and acrylic on canvas, showing the moonlight reflected on the waves. His *Chula Vista I* (1977) of pastel, glitter, glass and gold leaf on paper is a dramatic nighttime scene — one approaching otherworldly splendor.

With several more treasures, including Alexander's sculptural bars, *Blue Black Bar Triptych* (2014), and Impressionist paintings including Maurice Braun's *Yosemite, Evening from Glacier Point* and Jean Mannheim's *Aliso Canyon and Bridge at Coast*, the exhibition visually describes the natural flow of California art styles from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art  
18881 Von Karman Avenue, Suite 100, Irvine, CA 92612

parrasch heijnen



parrasch heijnen

