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Gardens of Visual Sensation, Night and Day

Martinique-based Artist Dora Vital's 'Jardin Nocturne' Makes an Atmospheric Impression at Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery



By [Josef Woodard](#)

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Exhibition view of Dora Vital, *JARDIN NOCTURNE* at Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery | Photo: Courtesy

Last fall's four-artist exhibition *Which Paradise?* was show number two for Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery, the impressive new-kid-in-town art space in town (see review [here](#)). As a kind of welcoming introductory overview of the artists and the curatorial gist of this space, all the artists were from or had direct connections to Martinique, the former home of gallery owners Fanny Seimandi and Julien Leprieur.



Dora Vital, "Autumnal," JARDIN NOCTURNE at Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery | Photo: Courtesy

With the gallery's third show, we get a more close-up – and more expansive – view of one of those artists, Dora Vital, a French-born artist living in Martinique. Her present show *Jardin Nocturne* serves as both a sweeping gathering of her post-post-impressionist paintings, as specific works and as an atmospheric whole coloring the gallery space itself. To enter the Anapamu Street gallery is to enter into Vital's world and artistic eye view.

And it is a view both evolving and unified, one with detectable traces of her acknowledged debt to Monet's garden paintings. As such, there is an interesting cross-venue resonance in the neighborhood, given the proximity of the gallery to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the present blockbuster exhibition in which is a spectacular impressionist feast, *The Impressionist Revolution: Monet to Matisse from the Dallas Museum of Art*.

But the Monet imprint is more than once removed in Vital's work, and made personal. Impressions matter here, over realistic accounting of what grows in an imagined garden, by night and day, but the relationships of art and nature and perception are uniquely reworked through the filter of Vital's vision.

Jardin Nocturne, curated by Jen Huang Bogan, showcases Vital's imagery in oil, acrylic, and pastel, in varying shades of diurnal and nocturnal light and seasonal differences. A delicate balancing act is underway, in which she at once embraces and abstracts nature.

The show is roughly organized, installed and grouped according to color palette, densities, and degrees of light and dark. Three large square canvases function as anchor pieces in the room – two facing each other on opposite long walls, from pale to cloudily florid in appearance – and the painting "Nocturnal Garden 2" on the back wall.



Dora Vital, "Nocturnal Garden," JARDIN NOCTURNE at Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery | Photo: Courtesy

The life of plants is key to her aesthetic, but floral elements can be at once respectful and used as pathways to muted, textured abstraction. A sense of all-over atmosphere, versus "flower portraiture" is a common tack here, as reflected in such titles as "Tropical Twilight," the "Canopy" series and "Evening Light Before Nightfall." The latter painting suggests a soggy jigsaw patterning of loose-fitting forms of green and blue (and, to quote the Miles Davis ballad, "Blue in Green").

A somewhat crisper floral flotsam hovers over a black ground in the smaller "Dawn" series of paintings, feeding off of the literal and conceptual contrast of light and dark, of night yielding to day. She often seems to savor the between-times – of days and seasons. More contrast-based drama is to be found in the red-on-black dance of the "Autumnal" series, and the aptly-named "Duality," with a handful of hues in congress and in tension.

As vibrantly displayed in *Jardin Nocturne*, Vital's Monet-inspired art represents one concentrated energy of her ongoing artistic life. Off in a corner of the gallery – and off in another stylistic direction – the painting "Life and the Follies" presents a more vaporous visual schemata. Heat, radiance and sensuality graced this yellow-suffused painting, with long-distance echoes of 19th century visionary J.M.W. Turner (himself an influence on Monet's own Impressionist revolution).

Remnants and tendrils of art history hum in this space, as does a sense of one artist's channeling of spirits from nature, culture and a personal artistic mission in progress.

Jardin Nocturne, by Dora Vital, is on view at Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery (33 W. Anapamu St.) through February 21. See seimandileprieur.com.



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