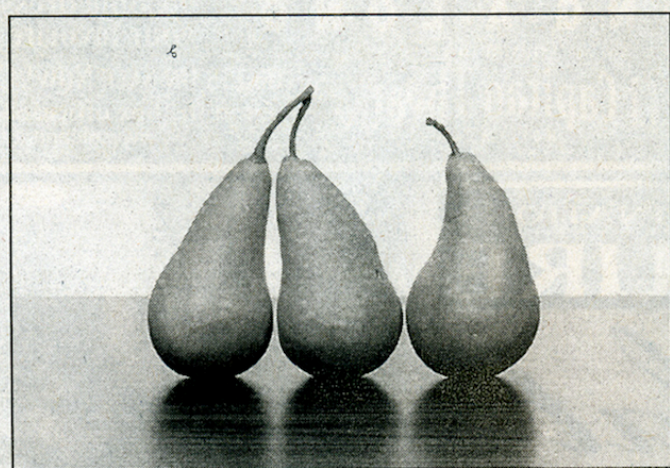


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Art Reviews

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT
TIMES ART CRITIC



KELLY NIPPER

Kelly Nipper's still life of pears on a table is one of four images of the fruit that take on animated qualities when placed in sequence.

Visual Flips: In the back hallway at Shoshana Wayne Gallery, a large color photograph (almost 4 feet high and 6 feet wide) focuses in tight on a small clearing in the woods. Dappled sunlight plays off leaves and tangled plants that cluster around the periphery of the scene, while the center remains dark, shadowy and visually obscure. Peering in, you can't quite make out what is there.

This recent photograph by Kelly Nipper performs a conceptual reversal of something like Dürer's famous monumental drawing of a clump of dirt, in which the entire universe and all the stars seem to bristle within a few densely concentrated square inches of lowly grass and weeds. An unfathomable black hole lurks instead at the center of Nipper's landscape space, while light and life dance around the edges.

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Nipper's photograph is one of 10 in an enigmatic group collectively titled "shotgun and figure 8." Neither a weapon nor a double loop-the-loop is anywhere to be seen, but the random dispersal of energy (shotgun) and the tightly controlled infinity formation (figure 8) create opposing poles by which her work is organized.

Four photographs depict Bosc pears standing on end on a wood-grained tabletop, placed before a white background. Three pears, one pear, four pears, two pears—the sequence of groupings seems random, until you notice that one of the pears is exactly repeated in three pictures. In the fourth, it might be shown from a different side. Your eye and mind scan back and forth among the images, turning the objects around in your head and shifting them in mental space, much the way an image of

virtual reality can be manipulated on a computer screen.

Suddenly, these still lifes have been animated. The sense of fabrication immediately makes you distrust what you're seeing. Are the pears really balanced on end? Or have they been manipulated, perhaps digitally inserted into the scene? Is the wood grain real? Was a table even there?

In these and other works in this subtle, eccentric and provocative show, Nipper takes advantage of a crucial feature of photography. There are visual inventions we immediately accept in painting, knowing as we do from the outset that the picture is an invention. Not so with camera images. Because they keep one foot in transcription of the world before the lens, our grounding is different. Nipper makes photographs that generate disturbing little earthquakes.

• Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 453-7535, through March 24. Closed Sunday and Monday.