

L.A.
Art Seen

"Down," by Peter Wayne Lewis.

Peter Wayne Lewis and
Others at Factory Place
Gallery

This is the sort of wildly uneven show that makes you wonder whether the choice of artists could possibly be that of a single person. Three of the four artists in Factory Place Gallery's new show are doing lightweight, amateurish work that seems only marginally qualified for gallery display. These works suffer doubly by sharing an exhibition with an artist of such conspicuous ability and insight as Peter Lewis, a resident of San Jose who is showing his work

for the first time in southern California. Lewis fills his canvases with all-over figurative and design elements — sometimes mere lines and spots — that weave into an evocative frieze, a mental fabric that feels half-seen, half-remembered. This idiom recalls Jackson Pollock just before and just after his drip period. And, as with Pollock, behind these paintings is a profound analysis of vision, an examination of the minimal bits of visual information from which the eye makes shapes. (This is the essential problem in the art of mosaic, and it is not surprising that many of Lewis' canvases have the feel of mosaics.) *Negrité*, for example, is a bold mix of black and green elements that evokes concrete Jamaican sights while remaining resolutely abstract. In *Labyrinth*, a field of deep green is broken up by lines and angles that sparsely suggest half-formed animals, shattered silhouettes, foliage, stumps, arms, branches — all sorts of impressions that would register on the eye of a lost walker. In the witty *L.A. Man*, a sky full of "eyes" and "snow-skis" arches over a pair of sunglasses and a four-leaf clover, all against a background the color of dried blood. If this is a valentine, it carries as much hate as love, and seems funny and chilling at the same time. Lewis' 18 canvases constitute some of the smartest painting being done on the West Coast right now. They display enormous poise and precision, and are built equally on analysis and intuition. I left this exhibition feeling I'd had a rare look at genius.