

Los Angeles Times  
 Around the Galleries  
 June 3, 2005

### What happens naturally.

Per Kirkeby's subdued paintings move at a glacial pace at L.A. Louver Gallery. And more.

By David Pagel, Special to The Times

**Per Kirkeby's** subdued paintings move at a glacial pace: slowly, steadily and with unstoppable forcefulness. At L.A. Louver Gallery, nine new oils on canvas eschew eye-grabbing flash for the incremental processes of nature, both botanical and geological.

The life cycles of organic matter, including seasonal moss, perennial underbrush and century-spanning trees, take shape across the densely packed surfaces of Kirkeby's fecund canvases. Rocks, dirt and air are similarly transformed, with the effects of erosion, earthquakes and volcanoes suggesting time-frames that make the human life span seem a flash in the pan.

There's something humbling about Kirkeby's profoundly unsentimental works. Neither expressive nor bombastic, they're not touchy-feely explorations of the artist's emotions. Yet there's plenty of room for affect, for finding connections and metaphors for human struggles and sentiments.

Kirkeby's paintings are not about nature — if nature is thought of as a realm apart from human activity and ingenuity. It's more accurate to think of his quietly magisterial works as being about natural processes — gradual developments and snail-paced transformations that animals (including humans) are mixed up in. Architectural structures, and what could be roads or ancient stone walls, bring cultural activity into his abstract pictures, where artifice plays an essential role.

Each of Kirkeby's sensual images is as much a picture of the natural landscape as it is a jumbled deposit of painterly techniques and procedures. Their palette rarely strays from verdant greens, earthy browns and sky blues.

Some pictures seem to be visual encyclopedias of the ways paint can be applied: thick, thin, watery translucent and dry brushed. There are linear silhouettes, impenetrable clumps, crashing cascades of color, atmospheric expanses and flicks of pigment no bigger than a grain of sand.

Most resemble several paintings superimposed atop one another. These include conventional landscapes as well as views that recall topographic maps and geological diagrams that reveal layers of bedrock and beyond. Imagine what Paul Cézanne might have painted if he had lived in the digital world.

Using nothing but paint, Kirkeby plays the Frenchman's jittery, faceted landscapes against the look of digitally transmitted imagery, marshaling both to survey a slow view of the big picture. This is only the second solo show in Los Angeles for the 66-year-old painter, who was born in Copenhagen and lives just outside the city. (His first was eight years ago.) It's not to be missed, especially at this pace.

**L.A. Louver Gallery**, 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through June 18. Closed Sundays and Mondays.



**LANDSCAPE:** Per Kirkeby's paintings highlight the gradual transformations that nature, animals and humans undergo.