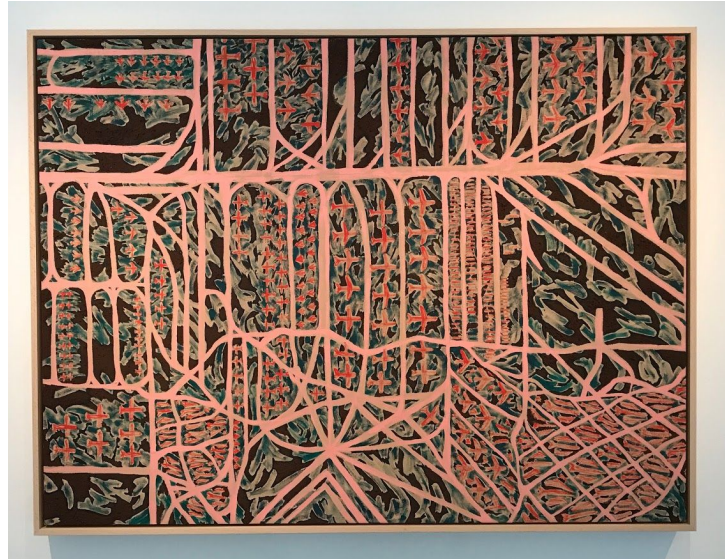


**Organization and Dirt-
on POM---PALM exhibition by Annie Swiderski at Williamson | Knight
By Lindsay Martin
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The paintings at Annie Swiderski's new exhibition, *POM---PALM* at Williamson|Knight gallery converse about a mystical and strange location; Tucson, Arizona. Each composition meditates part of the artist's version of Tucson and are all joined together in a unified color scheme. Like a flock of the same species of birds singing all at once, the paintings form a cacophony of conversation. One exchange exists between a composition of ants and one of planes, another between a pent-up dust storm piece and a painting of an undisturbed ant hill. An image of a large bird in the corner of the square gallery overlooks every image from an airplane parking lot to an upscale condo front, to a large bingo sheet, to a found material sculpture. Motifs of retirement living counteract with spiritual forces and agitated bugs in this work, forcing the viewer to question what place Annie Swiderski allows us to experience.



As I follow the pathways within each painting at the *POM---PALM* exhibition, agitated ants and tiny planes clutter tunnels and airways like cows in a pastured landscape. Annie Swiderski maps the canvas with a nest of planes in *Resting Place* the same way she carves the curved trenches of ants in *Sweeper*, using a medium brush to draw out their routes and roads. These two paintings collocate organizational strategies; the ant tunnels and the plane tarmac compare to suburban

subdivisions. Swiderski's juxtaposed cartographic drawings of ants and planes shed light on our absurd ways of mapping and building roads, tunnels and neighborhoods. Developed America is an odd organizational society that creates loop-de-loop cul-de-sacs in labyrinths of housing developments, and Swiderski shows us the similarity with a composition of a busy working ant farm in *Sweeper*. In this painting, the ants are having a typical work day. In *Resting Place*, the planes are napping after many long journeys under their wings. Without familiarity of Tucson, the paintings tell a contradictory narrative: planes are asleep as ants are clocking in.

Along the same gallery walls, the artist depicts an ant hill in a low-hung painting, a fanciful condo and a large dust storm crammed inside a small rectangular panel. Palm trees guard an intimate home in *Dark and Dusty Idyll*, taking us to a warm and developed environment and possibly a heavenly retirement village. Natural earth tones are juxtaposed with juicy tropical turquoise, Navajo blanket yellow and pink, and Grand Canyon plateaus. Next to the painting of a home's exterior, there is an alarming dust storm raging on in *The Devil's Rodeo*. The storm painting faces the ant hill painting from a high perspective, looking down as if it is about to smite the ants' dwelling from on a high mountain top. The storm evokes a more spiritual presence than *We Went to Consult the Oracle* because of its almost abstract raging imagery and a literal high elevation. Swiderski's paintings of uprooted and unorganized dirt show natural disaster possibilities in Tucson, but as the show is situated in Portland, we have a long list of other natural disasters that we worry about, like tsunamis and earthquakes, less ants and tornadoes. As someone who has never visited Arizona before, my mind wrestles with the imagery because I do not speak the local slang. I have never seen a dust storm but I am aware of the threat of a tornado as someone born in the midwest. I can only refer to images of other places I have visited to relate to *POM---PALM*, much like reviewing someone else's photo album. Where, other than likeness in color palette and presentation, is the thread that ties these clues together? Or, is this show just a room filled with fragments collected from a place? I am not given clues or writing, only dark titles that suggest something is aloof in this sleepy and dusty world.

The viewer enters the gallery by immediately stepping on a large bingo tile sculpture crafted like a paved stone patio. Mix a bingo sheet with ants, and my mind drifts to where they integrate in my own archive. I remember the story my grandmother told me about an older lady who was sunbathing on the beach and fell asleep next to an anthill. She woke up to find half of her arm eaten off by ants, ants crawling everywhere and eating her alive. *Dark and Dusty Idyll* and *Some Limelight for the Outliver* (the bingo sheet) point to the quiet and sleepy culture that exists adjacent to these active ant hills. Sleepy towns, retired planes and people exist with and around busy ant life. This is now how I will think of Tucson.

Each painting's material list includes a unique addition: *ant hill*. Annie Swiderski steals from the ant architecture to create the work, scooping out their bedrooms and living rooms for material to create genuine pigment of the landscape. Had I not read the material list, the chunky bits of dirt on the panel would have gone unnoticed, like mixed material painting or additive compound for overly thick paint. I wonder if the ant hill does something special to the painting's pigment. It could act as more collection, more archive of the place by encasing the dirt forever on a painting, elevating the ant hill as an image. Painting an ant hill with its own dirt is taking the visual part of the anthill and counteracting the hill with a sense of touch. The act of painting with ant hill may suggest how the ants are the secret omnipotent, all-seeing, all-knowing spirits of this desert landscape because they affect every other part of the exhibition's imagery.



The insects build everywhere and their actions are always unnoticed. The air is fraught with airplanes and tornadoes and the land controlled by the retirement communities. Underground, the ants never retire and never sleep. There is a quiet retired life; then there is a subterranean warfare. Perhaps Annie Swiderski struggles with peaceful Tucson, and is looking for a battle of some sort that rages within her new location. Maybe, it is Swiderski's sense of imagination that is making her leap from interior and exterior room paintings to see what else can be uncovered by noticing all the surroundings, big and small, of our little American suburbs. Where does a painting act as a detective? What can we notice about these seemingly small insects, and how they eat up our community slowly? It seems that the artist is searching for unrest in her supposed plateau paradise.

