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Tony Berlant

Within

February 9-March 11, 2006

Reception for the artist Thursday, February 9, 6-8 pm

Tuesday-Saturday 10-6

These new works by Tony Berlant, made with his distinctive materials and technique, are among the most complex and evocative he has made over the span of several decades. They vibrate with dazzling activity that walks the line between abstraction and representation, creating a dynamic sensory experience and a state of psychological seduction and intrigue.

In one sense, it is accurate to describe the subjects of these works as desert landscapes and night-blooming cactus flowers. Beyond that is the magic of Berlant's method of composition in which the bright heads of thousands of small nails punctuate cutout shapes of fabricated sheet metal assembled and collaged onto wood panels. On the component parts are the colors, patterns and textures originally printed on the metal, sometimes bits of things we can identify but just as often not. Each segment functions like a brushstroke in a painting, accumulating to form an image while maintaining its discrete identity.

One might also describe the subject of these hallucinatory works as the unfathomable realities of nature, consciousness and perception. And time. Natural forces have shaped the desert landscape over vast amounts of time. The epiphyllum blooms for a single night yet evolved to do so over countless millennia.

The medium-size landscapes feature a range of dark colors, with flashes of iridescence and passages of light. *Clearing* shows a fringe of scrubby plants in front of a rocky ridge, bathed in moonlight beneath a multi-hued sky. *Ground* describes the landscape in a particularly fractured, cubist fashion and reads as though one is looking not across the desert but directly down upon it, perhaps from a great height. And the ridge of stone and undulating plants flowing diagonally across the aquamarine sky of *Fandango* seems to evoke the desert's past life as seabed.

A series of smaller works display single flowers. Berlant improvises with his materials, portraying petals and stamens with a variety of colors and textures. Some are brilliantly stark against white-spattered black grounds while other blossoms, composed of adjacent planes of similarly colored pieces, can barely be distinguished from their surroundings.

Tony Berlant was born in New York in 1941 and lives in Santa Monica, California. In 1964, the Los Angeles County acquired its first work of the very young artist, and today Berlant's work is included in many museum collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Major public commissions include the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts, Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C., San Francisco International Airport and the Target Corporation headquarters in Minneapolis.