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Jennifer Coates at Luxe Gallery
by Joyce Korotkin

In her first solo show in New York, Jennifer Coates creates a fantastical world of imaginary pseudo-landscapes evoked by a combination of figurative elements (such as horizon lines and vaguely grassy plains) combined with purely abstract geometric and organic patterns, vivacious, intense colors and bursts of sparkling lights. Coates traverses a lot of formal territory in these works, wandering from the playful ebullience of *Hatching Stars* and *Swamp Fizz*, to the darker implications of *Replicator*; veering as well between the low art of kitsch and the high art of classicism. Her imagery is at one and the same realistic, abstract, painterly, refined, expressionist and almost cartoonish.



Cloudy, 2004. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 72 inches: Luxe Gallery, NY

A master of the incidental moment, Coates animates her surfaces by allowing bits of the history of their making to show in some areas, even as she tightly renders others. Painterly moments thus become visual hot spots that bring the works to visceral life; a bit of intense turquoise here, for instance, peeking through a glaze of yellowed green, imbues the surface with radiant color that keeps the eye bouncing, or a scumbled expressionist passage suggestive of landscape might be found in juxtaposition to almost illustrative controlled squiggled lines that suggest internal organs or mazes with no end.

Coates' mixed metaphors allow high art and the low art of kitsch to collide in her more playful works that use spangled lights straight out of fairy tales and childhood fantasies. These intermix the enchantment of magic wands with the spectacular light shows of fireworks as well as nature's own brilliance (shooting stars, the Milky Way, the Northern lights and such). This is most evident in *Blackboard Twinkle & Hatching Stars*, with its dazzling stardust effects.

Referencing geometric abstraction in another work, Coates repeats a seemingly endless pattern of polychromatic triangles that comingle, connect and disconnect against a communal flat ground to form, or perhaps to separate from, a greater whole. Entitled *Replicator*, darker interpretations are implied than the seemingly innocent imagery with its decorative patterning and delicious colors would at first suggest.