

ARTFORUM

Peter Flaccus

Author: Cathryn Drake

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Shortly after arriving in Italy eleven years ago, American painter Peter Flaccus abandoned oil paint and began using encaustic to form his gestural imagery on wood. He found that he could more easily manipulate, scrape, or brush the wax pigment into textural forms, and soon discovered methods such as incising and filling to add distinct shapes, layers, and depth to his compositions. Although Flaccus describes his new work as a natural evolution, visually it is a distinct departure from the pale and delicate palette of his previous encaustic experiments with the transparency and opacity, and with the natural tones of wax and wood.

Flaccus's current, more dynamic experiments in color combination, as well as a completely different method of handling the encaustic, appear as silent explosions of celestial orbs with delicate haloes. Rather than applying the wax by hand, he pours his heated colors all at once onto the wood and waits for them to expand, merge, set, and cool. In one, the combination of yellows and a gray-white creates a striking impression of heat and depth emanating from the center of a cool haloed nimbus. Others have circular forms with impossibly delicate feathered haloes that have merged naturally onto a surface of a deep or intensely bright contrasting background color. There is an element of accident; if it is not satisfactory, the result is discarded. In contrast to the highly textured surfaces of Flaccus's previous work, the top is then scraped over completely by hand to create an impossibly and sensually smooth surface.

The show consists of a number of small paintings along with giant panels of four, six, or nine sections. These large compositions are particularly hard to achieve, as each part must be individually blocked off and poured. But the multiple images together create an impression of movement, and their surprising and vibrant color combinations are spiritually uplifting. Stimulating yet tranquil, they're the unlikely happy result of delicate natural shapes formed with unnatural combinations of vibrating color.