

LOS ANGELES

Lynton Wells at Post

The witty, implacable paintings of New York artist Lynton Wells seem to flaunt the inscrutable processes by which they came to be. The nine shrewd works displayed here feature showy, emblematic calligraphic designs evidently drawn and painted in colored resin over backgrounds of raw pigment rubbed directly into the canvas. Although meticulously hand-painted, the glossy images



Lynton Wells: *Fish*, 2000-01, resin and raw pigment on canvas, 72 by 36 inches; at Post.

have a machine-made look, as if they were, say, transfer decals or press-on tattoos. The paintings feature caricatured creatures and environments with certain aggrandized segments—a frog's mottled camouflage markings, a ghostlike snake's exaggerated coil, an expanse of zigzagging ocean waves—that form patterns. By emphasizing these patterns, Wells celebrates a surreal order lurking within everyday reality.

In *Frog (orange ground)*, 2000, a stylized splash forms a crown poised above the tilted head of a frog hovering on a field of orange. As if electrified, the amphibian's webbed toes glisten with light—perhaps signaling the frog's imminent metamorphosis into a prince. A fairy-tale atmosphere similarly animates the vertically configured *Fish* (2000-01), which depicts an elaborately finned carp that hugs a fishing pole whose long looped line descends into a wild graphic flourish representing the water below. Illuminated with shimmering light, the fishing line doubles back on itself; its sensuous path is traced in multiple, fragmented figure eights. The black fins of the fish are boldly feathered, like thick strokes of Japanese calligraphy. Here, Wells makes a dual proposition: ornamentation is the fun part of both art and nature.

Other paintings convey less lighthearted messages. The spiraling, red-tinged body of the devilish *Snake* (2000) ends in a rattle that consists of three conjoined dollar signs. In another painting, nerves from two disembodied human brains lead into a tangle of squiggled neurons, from which emerge three letters that spell "SEX." Accented

with raw yellow pigment, the word and its visceral trails glow against a pungent lime background. Wells slyly presents virtuoso embellishments as sensory observations heightened by art, and all the juicier for it. Why aren't these pictures better known?

[The exhibition previously appeared at Rebecca Ibel Gallery, Columbus, Ohio.]

—Michael Duncan