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AROUND THE GALLERIES

By David Pagel
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Soapsuds

and snowmen



"Bubbles and Snowmen" is among the more succinct shows of the season. At Mark Moore Gallery, it includes only five round paintings by **Todd Hebert**. Each pretty much depicts the same blurry scene: a snowman standing in a large field beneath a soft blue sky, the distant horizon defined by a gray cluster of leafless trees. All that seems to distinguish the visually subdued works is their diameters, which range from 18 inches to 5 feet, and the number of exquisitely rendered soap bubbles floating in their foregrounds — from none to a couple of dozen.

Hebert's quiet little exhibition is also among the most curiously fascinating. Despite its simplicity, it is acutely engaging.

Its freshness is all the more peculiar because Hebert's paintings wear their affection and respect for several impressive historical precedents on their sleeves. Robert Irwin's stunning disks come quickly to mind, as do Ed Ruscha's terrifically illusionistic pictures of foamy soapsuds and Robert Therrien's multi-size sculptures of abstract snowmen.

Even so, Hebert's lovely paintings slip out from under the long shadows cast by these revered artists. Part of that is because his works do not take themselves too seriously. If you squint just a bit, it is easy to see his paintings as faces, with snowman noses and forest eyes — which sometimes wink.

More important, Hebert's oddly enchanting paintings sustain interest because they are even more difficult to hold in memory than they are to distinguish from one another. Each time you look at one, you feel as if you are seeing it for the first time, with fresh eyes and open mind. That's an experience that is hard to come by and well worth savoring.

Mark Moore Gallery, 2525 Michigan Ave., Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, (310) 453-3031, through Feb. 10. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.markmooregallery.com