

Mary Anna Pomonis' 'In Brio' at Annie Wharton L.A. Shows How Diamonds Really Are a Girl's Best Friend  
L.A. Weekly  
By Carol Chen  
November 23, 2011

A few years ago, artist Mary Anna Pomonis went through a painful divorce. She found that when she took off her diamond wedding ring for good, it was also as though she were shedding a large part of her social status as a woman. She felt empty and powerless without the rock on her hand, and she even found that strangers treated her differently.

Luckily, that lost feeling proved to be just the first step in a positive transformation process. Without the symbolic tether of the ring, Pomonis became free to discover herself - the person who lay beneath the stone.

As an artist, she had always had an appreciation for the beauty of gemstones, and would occasionally include images of them in her work. Afterwards, she took her interest in them to a whole new level, studying their social and mystical symbolism as well as their ties to contemporary art and popular culture. The result is a stunning and triumphant series of large-scale airbrush paintings, titled "In Brio," currently on view at Annie Wharton Los Angeles, located in the Pacific Design Center.

Pomonis' paintings dazzle viewers at the opening reception

As Pomonis explains, "In Brio" is a title she coined to refer to an energy that emerges out of a blank space. Part of what makes the paintings in this show so powerful is that each image seems to emerge from a pit of darkness, to finally stand and hold its own light. Some feature enormous gemstones showing off their colorful facets against black backgrounds; others have symbols blasting light out of a night sky.

The titles of the works reveal much of the inspiration and thinking that went into them. One imposing piece, measuring a full seven feet tall, is titled *When I Look Into My Ring It Gives Me the Strangest Feeling for Beauty*, after Elizabeth Taylor on the Krupp. Pomonis has had an ongoing interest in Taylor, admiring the movie star's spunky individualism and sharing her interest in jewels. Taylor had purchased the Krupp diamond because she knew that the Krupp family had manufactured bullets in Germany during World War II. As Pomonis explains, "When she wore that stone she reclaimed her power as a Jew and very gracefully flipped the Krupp family off. I love that."

Acting as something of a masculine companion to the feminine Krupp piece is the equally impressive *The Spotlight from Within*, after Christopher Knight on Billy Al Bengston. When she first moved to Los Angeles and began visiting the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Billy Al Bengston -- who is known for using chevron images in his paintings -- was one of the first artists whose work she saw, and she drew inspiration from his work. Judy Chicago, who studied under Bengston and whose early works attempted to wed her feminine perspective to the minimalist style, also became an influence on Pomonis. Finally, Pomonis reads a lot for inspiration, and has a particular affinity for L.A. Times critic Christopher Knight. Like her diamond paintings, *The Spotlight from Within* shows off Pomonis' facility with architectural properties as well as intangible auras.

Last May I wrote about a performance work that Pomonis did at Beacon Arts Building in Inglewood, which she titled *Mouawad's Magic Section*. The performance was a complex ritual that utilized the shapes inherent in the famous Mouawad diamond and also referenced Roman mythology, Masonic symbolism and Tibetan sand mandalas. The ritual culminated in an incantation adapted from Catullus, in which Pomonis repeated the lines, "Let those love now, who have never loved before. Let those who love, love forevermore." It felt to me at the time like a healing spell, and judging from this winning exhibition, half of which was sold out before the opening reception, I'd say the spell worked some magic. Mary Anna Pomonis' "In Brio" shows concurrently with [TargetVideo77: Cal Punk and Performance](#), a Pacific Standard Time-affiliated exhibition of the legendary punk video project, at Annie Wharton Los Angeles through January 6.