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Art in Review

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Charles Seliger

Michael Rosenfeld

24 West 57th Street, Manhattan

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From a distance, Charles Seliger's beautiful and wonderfully absorbing paintings on laptop-size panels look like diffuse, fluttering fields of floral color. They have a kind of prettiness that would have been dismissed as too feminine in less enlightened times.

Up close you discover that the fields are made up of countless tiny organic or crystalline forms defined by near microscopic lines. "Far Horizon" gives the impression of a glowing pink object imbedded like a mystic jewel in luminous green and aqua blue ice. "Daystar" has a centered, orange mandalalike circle that appears to be constructed of innumerable tiny tree branches or bones. Some paintings are crammed edge to edge with forms resembling leaves and flowers; others are like aerial views of the earth's surface.

Mr. Seliger, who had an exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery in 1945 when he was 19, begins his pictures by randomly improvising and then progressively clarifying the forms that emerge. Like the Abstract Expressionists, he was inspired by Surrealist automatism, but his painstaking, monkish craft and his lush decorative dimension also call to mind the works of medieval manuscript illuminators and Indian miniaturists. The thrill is in the leap from the finite, exquisitely sensuous surface to the illusion of infinite, inwardly expanding cosmic space. KEN JOHNSON

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