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Around the Galleries
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Looking at art as a battlefield
Christopher Knight, Art Critic

"Full Spectrum Dominance," the title of **Chris Barnard's** show of five recent paintings at Sam Lee Gallery, is the name of an American military doctrine that is also sheerest fantasy: In a war zone, the military attempts total control over every feature of the battleground, including hardware, software and manpower.

It might look good on paper, especially in the procurement office, but the inevitable chasm between theory and practice shows that such a thing is impossible. Barnard's large abstract paintings enact various collisions between flat, mechanistic patterning and the liquid illusion of deep, luminous space to create a grinding metaphor for this conflicted form of thinking.

A circular shape like a steely gray turbojet flickers with spectral color, glimpsed through its core and exploding in fiery dribbles around its periphery. A digital gray checkerboard tilts back into an atmospheric blue sky, glowing ominously at one side, while another vertical checkerboard warps as it abuts a watery multicolored form. Rainbow-colored horizontal lines stutter across a massive, mottled, charcoal brown form, as if it were the visual equivalent of stone scraping metal.

Barnard pits intimations of rockets, weaponry and computer information against organic fields of sumptuous color. If the sideswipe would sometimes benefit from greater pictorial pressure and chromatic stress, the best works, such as "Booster" and "No Exit," do their job with skill.

Sam Lee Gallery, 990 N. Hill Street No. 190, Chinatown, (323) 227-0275, through March 13.
Closed Mondays and Tuesdays. www.samleegallery.com.