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Around the Galleries
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Mobilizing Images of War
By Christopher Knight, Art Critic

Darren Hostetter's 15 mournful paintings on aluminum panels at the Sam Lee Gallery merge nature and culture. Weapons of war assume a condition as humanly unmanageable as the fickle weather.

Flat or slightly modulated fields of color are arrayed with small, meticulously rendered images of fighter jets, cargo planes, surveillance satellites, surface-to-air missiles and the like. Hostetter arranges this military hardware in compositions that suggest natural phenomena -- a swarm of insects, snowflakes, a flock of geese, ice crystals on glass, a galaxy in deep space or a school of fish in the deep sea.

Perhaps it's a combination of the subject matter and the metal sheets, which stand an inch or so away from the wall, but the paintings suggest the solitary aura of a model airplane enthusiast. (Hostetter studied illustration before finishing his master's degree in fine arts.) The quiet tension between destructive weaponry and human nature -- between the machinery of death and the miracle of life, here fused into a single entity -- is at once gentle and threatening, pretty and bleak.

Sam Lee Gallery, 990 N. Hill Street #190, Chinatown, Los Angeles, (323) 227-0275, through December 6. Closed Sundays through Tuesdays. www.samleegallery.com.