

Los Angeles Times

AROUND THE GALLERIES

BY SHARON MIZOTA

A poetic mood captured in neon

Mary Weatherford is known for beautiful abstract paintings derived from natural forms, but her latest exhibition at LAXART is a big risk.

As in previous series, these large paintings (nearly too large actually, for LAXART's main gallery) are inspired by a specific place, Bakersfield, where Weatherford recently completed a residency. They are not landscapes per se but more like mood poems: rough-edged, vertical rectangles composed of thin, delicate washes of color.

Luminous on their own, the colors are literally lighted by startling lines, rendered in actual tubes of neon affixed to the canvases. An inky bluish field is bisected by a hard, red conduit. A softer rose-colored one is punctuated with a staccato, white-pink glow.

Weatherford leaves the tubes exposed with trailing white cords that drape across the works — they become graceful negative lines,

cutting through the color washes to not quite blend into the background. It could have been gimmicky, but somehow it works.

The compositions never quite resolve entirely into two dimensions (although they do work well through the flattening gaze of the camera). This tension is part of their appeal as the eye moves continually between hard and soft edges, actual and painted light.

But more important is the mood that the works generate: There's something enveloping and luxuriant about them, particularly in the darker pieces. They evoke that magic hour when the neon first sputters on and the horizon seems to go on forever.

LAXART, 2640 S. La Cienega Blvd., (310) 559-0166, through Oct. 27. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.laxart.org