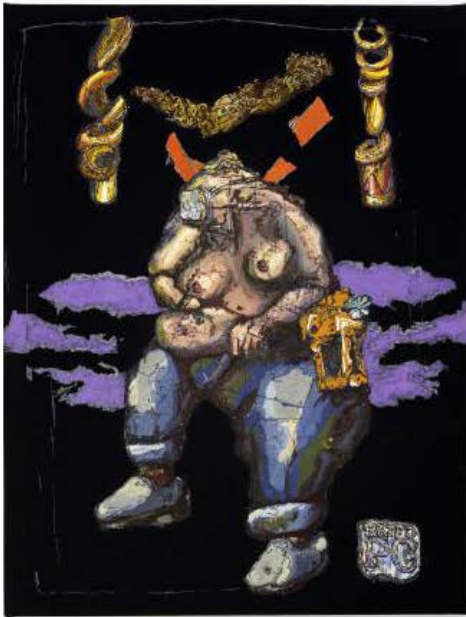


Art in America

In his first New York outing, Los Angeles painter Ivan Morley, who has been showing in Santa Monica and in Europe for the last decade, offered his distinctive blend of palpability and palaver in eight works dated 2008 or '09. The titles of these playfully inventive paintings, and the fact that they're repeated, suggest that there is a narrative, even when the work is entirely abstract. For example, the show included two works called *A True Tale*. The one dated 2008 is a big vertical (103 by 39 inches) that, atypically, consists entirely of patches of machine-embroidered color on canvas, the threads wispy like dry brushstrokes at the edge of each color area. The one dated 2009 is a sizable horizontal with more sharply defined blocks as well as two patches of patterns, both with fruity-looking circles over landscape-like rectangles in a combination that recalls kitchen wallpaper. The materials here are still primarily thread on canvas, but the canvas is stretched over wood and the surface is embellished with oil paint, wax and KY Jelly.



Another repeated title is *Tehachepi (sic)*. There were three of those, all with imagery that provokes curiosity but clarifies nothing. One features a masked obese woman, breasts exposed; another centers on a lobster. The third consists of a mushroom cloud made up of what look like purple intestines, tangles of yellow yarn and silver belt buckles (I'm guessing here), above which appear two foamy pitchers of beer and either a motorcycle cap or a German officer's cap. The style falls somewhere between Goth comics and Max Beckmann. The materials contribute to the impact: this piece is painted with oil, wax and KY Jelly on tooled and dyed leather in an irregular shape that resembles a three-part folding screen. The title, a little Googling suggests, might be due to the fact that the California town of Tehachapi has spelled its name four ways, but what that has to do with the imagery remains an amusing mystery.

Morley also teases with text, as in the painting *Collateral*, where the words "Clyfford Still Real Estate" emerge from a muddled background, looking tangible and battered, like an old business sign in a cartoon. It turns out that understanding *Collateral*, as well as an irregular-shaped abstraction called *Don, George, Diane* and some other works, is enhanced by hints in a section of the artist's website called *Anecdotes*. Although the anecdotes consist mostly of non sequitur sentences, they extend the sense that Morley is drawing upon whatever fascinates him—a story, a substance, an artist—and pulling elements together into painting/objects that maintain their own quirky identity but allow plenty of scope for the viewer's participatory imagining. Morley is based in the land of Hollywood fantasy, yet his thinking seems shaped more by the Brothers Grimm.

Photo: Ivan Morley: *Tehachepi (sic)*, 2009, oil, wax and KY Jelly on cotton, 51 by 39 inches; at Kimmerich.