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Culture Monster

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Art review: Ali Smith, 'Flip Side' at Mark Moore Gallery

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Digital technology may not have killed off collage, but software like Photoshop has made the art of cut-and-pasted paper look very last century. At Mark Moore Gallery, Ali Smith's new paintings gaze back at collage with fondness and purpose.

With their rough edges, fractured compositions and unpredictable scale-shifts, the L.A. artist paints energetic pictures whose wild swipes and slashes are not expressive — in any way, shape or form. Rather than standing in as authentic emblems of inner turmoil or heartfelt emotions, the whiplash gestures in Smith's paintings take on lives of their own.

Each of Smith's oils on canvas is an exuberant ruin, a cartoon train-wreck of a composition that combines the unselfconsciousness of doodles with the deliberate kick of carefully wrought images.

Some, like "Bend and Stray" and "Orbital," are the visual equivalent of deleted data, giant clusters of code that have disappeared from the screen but still lurk in the ether. Others, like "Recto Verso" and "Flip Side," resemble ad hoc maps of imaginary landscapes. Still others, like "Creature/Creation" and "Viral Spiral," appear to be abstract cyborgs whose DNA shares strands with works by such Modernists as Andre Masson and Roberto Matta.

The logic of collage serves Smith very well, especially when her fragmented paintings take viewers far beyond the familiar.

-- David Pagel

Mark Moore Gallery, 5790 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (310) 453-3031, through April 7. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.markmooregallery.com.

Image: Ali Smith, "Bend and Stray," 2012. Credit: Mark Moore Gallery.