



Margaret Curtis, *Earth*, 1999.

Margaret Curtis

P.P.O.W., through May 29
(see Soho).

When Margaret Curtis debuted at P.P.O.W. five years ago, her canvases, like those of some Victorian fairy painter, described a strange universe of wildflowers and cornstalks populated by teeny, whimsical figures. Curtis's latest paintings are more abstract and less playful than this earlier work. She has dampened the fantastical content, replacing it with a purely rococo play of decorative elements—mostly ribbons or pieces of cloth tied around flowers and such. This change in direction, however, does nothing to diminish the pleasures of this show.

Broken Horizon picks up where Curtis's last group of paintings left off. It depicts a stick dropped in a field, tied with colorful ribbons, looking like a kind of *Titanic* in the rye. *Abandoned Female Form* and *Sign from Behind* show the scarecrowlike presence of road signs,

seen from behind, festooned with hair ribbons. *Banner* features a clothesline; here, Curtis demonstrates her prowess at rendering different-colored fabrics flying in the breeze. *The Language of Flowers* shows a stand of wildflowers: One flower is done up in doll's clothes; another has a red ribbon tied to it.

Earth is perhaps the best work in the show: A Coney Island of colors and textures, it imagines a geological formation as a massive deli sandwich—one that might be seen by the characters from *Antz*. Curtis has gone to particular pains to render squishes, blobs, meshes and a myriad of other devices suggesting food, fabric and sediment. Her technical virtuosity is both a plus and a minus, however: It's fun to look at, but worrisome too. Curtis may be losing sight of her fantasy forest for the trees of painterly technique. For the moment, though, she still hangs on to her private little worlds of memory and reverie.

—Robert Mahoney