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By Cate McQuaid

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Matt Harle has spent much of the last decade grappling with form through the use of oddball materials such as styrofoam and rubber.

Galleries

He's made irritating and beguiling works, sculptures and paintings that showed originality but left viewers scratching their heads. In his new show at Genovese/Sullivan, Harle makes a leap into rigorous work that demonstrates his formal eloquence and embodies big spiritual and artistic themes.

He takes the title of his show, "Canyon, Stars," from composer Olivier Messiaen's "Des Canyons aux Etoiles." "The landscape Messiaen evokes," Harle writes, "is a literal heaven on earth, the result of a willful ignorance that the duality ever existed."

The artist creates his own heaven on earth by carving great hill-shaped blocks from styrofoam, and having them stand in at once as land and sky. He dollops white plaster near the top to mimic a cloud, then sheathes the whole piece in clear vinyl. He may paint the styrofoam — or the vinyl. Each wall hanging has an unfinished quality, drawing attention to the materials and to the artist's hand.

"Untitled (Pink)" is a pink hill with a small dollop of white plas-

Matt Harle: Canyons, Stars and Fran Siegel: Frequency

At: Genovese/Sullivan Gallery, 46 Thayer St., through Nov. 29

Joan Snyder: In Times of Great Disorder

At: Nielsen Gallery, 179 Newbury St., through Nov. 25

Maggi Brown: New Paintings

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery, 10 Newbury St., through Nov. 29

ter near the top; around the plaster, Harle awkwardly smudges and speckles blue over the vinyl, reiterating that this is a landscape, with clouds scudding through a sky. At the same time, the work is such a discrete object, a thing unto itself, that separate ideas such as earth and sky all fold into one.

Just as the hill shape and the candy colors work to transform the two elements of earth and sky into one, the vinyl ties together light and shadow, casting color and shadow onto the wall behind and reflecting light out.

These are beautiful, funny, and still occasionally annoying works. With all the sheathing and swelling, they can't help but have a sexual quality. Add the cartoon aura and offbeat materials to the intentionally awkward construction,

and you have works with an adolescent tension. Not that they are immature; with this work, Harle has come into his own.

Fran Siegel has a lovely, although not entirely successful, installation up at Genovese/Sullivan. "Frequency" attempts to represent the first trans-Atlantic wireless communication in 1903. In the inverted-pyramid shape of Guglielmo Marconi's first antenna, Siegel has strung 1,000 volcanic rocks on monofilaments from the ceiling. The installation looks like a ritual site, with concentric, suspended rectangles dropping toward a pile of rocks in the center of the floor. Air currents are supposed to make the rocks clatter together to replicate the static of that first transmission, but that doesn't happen. The piece is still and feels ancient, more about contemplation than communication.