



Catch the eye, then the brain

It's difficult to know what you're looking at when you stand in front of **Rebecca Morales'** new paintings, and that's one of the best things about them.

At the Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Morales' mixed-media works on irregularly shaped swatches of specially prepared calfskin make a great first impression. Then they get better. And better.

Their colors pop, especially in three big diptychs, each of which is about 6 feet tall or long. Blazing reds, supersaturated blues, smoldering oranges and tangy greens intermingle with delicate pastels in all sorts of silvery shades.

Morales draws like an architect, with laser-sharp lines that

describe things so precisely you instantly think her abstract pictures depict real things in the real world. At the same time, Morales' fantastically crafted abstractions get your imagination going in so many directions that you start to wonder why they're neither maddening nor frustrating but strangely serene in their own offbeat, exquisitely sensitive way.

The rugged vellum links them to such ancient archaeological treasures as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The forms Morales paints and draws recall magnified images of microorganisms, viruses and cellular structures with their own queasy beauty. Their textures, however, have less to do with medical textbooks or botanical manuals than arts-and-crafts handbooks, especially those instructing hobbyists how to crochet, knit and work with silky lengths of thread and soft folds of fabric.

There's also an odd, photographic quality to Morales' mesmerizing works, which combine watercolor, gouache, pastel and ink in ways that make light look liquid, sensuous, stirring. Think mid-19th century daguerreotypes, which seem to capture the souls of sitters via science and its new-fangled technologies.

All of Morales' deeply intriguing pieces play so fast and loose with such a wide range of associations that you'd think they'd come off as misbegotten mélanges: postmodern conglomerations of a little of this and a little of that, adding up to a whole lot less than the sum of their parts.

But they don't.

You have to see them to believe them, even if you don't know what you're looking at.

Daniel Weinberg Gallery, 6148 Wilshire Blvd., L.A., (323) 954-8425, through March 14. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.danielweinberggallery.com.