

“Thomas Woodruff: The Four Temperament Variations”

By Kara L. Rooney

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Thomas Woodruff's recent suite of paintings at P.P.O.W. does nothing short of dazzle. Technical prowess is the hallmark of Woodruff's oeuvre—the drama of near Renaissance-like handiwork palpable in each brushstroke—as is the painter's electrifyingly clever conflation of academic art history and the post-apocalyptic sublime. Of note are the sheer number of paintings on display (25 in all), each subset occupying a different section of the gallery and identified by a corresponding palette: “Melancholic,” night-soaked indigos; “Choleric,” duskily lit ambers; “Phlegmatic,” translucent, chalky whites; and Sanguine, eroticized crimsons. Yet for all the exhibition's

curatorial administration, the work's narrative content is infinitely more complex. A veritable feast of the imagination: fantastical chimeras in various states of ecstatic decay, redolent landscapes (the likes of Caspar David Friedrich), opulent portraiture, water-submerged vixens, and the beautifully grotesque. These images attack and careen off the gallery walls. Dictated by themes as far-ranging as queer culture and the Victorian Gothic, Woodruff's work culls equally from the depths of personal fetishism and archetypal psychology. Such loaded imagery may not be for everyone but, like a wolf descending on its prey, it is impossible to ignore.