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Christopher Grimes Gallery

PULSATING: Trees form a throbbing emerald screen above cool wisps of fog in Sharon Ellis' "Eucalyptus and Poppies."

A glorious tribute to California

By Leah Ollman
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Many years ago in a museum show, I overheard a docent identify a schoolboy's enthusiastic response to a **Sharon Ellis** painting, his repeated, rapid intake of breath, as "art asthma."

Ellis' first L.A. gallery show in five years, at Christopher Grimes Gallery, induces a similar state of euphoric, breathless shock. The six paintings constitute a rapturous, dazzling ode to California — its sea, expansive sky, desert landscape, even its contributions to Modernist art history.

In "Kelp Forest," Ellis introduces a female figure, a water spirit of sorts, into a mirrored pattern of sinuous green vines and electric threads of light. The human form is new to her work, and treated much like the radiating swirls of flowers and leaves in a neighboring painting: It skirts kitsch, pushing ornament into the realm of the hypnotic.

"Lotus for Agnes" pays tribute to Agnes Pelton, whose luminous paintings of plants and other forms were as much internal as external still lifes. Pelton, along with William Blake, Samuel Palmer and Charles Burchfield, among others, laid the foundation for Ellis' intensely visceral take on nature.

That rapture peaks in paintings like "Eucalyptus and Poppies," where trees form a throbbing, gleaming emerald screen above cool, viscous wisps of violet fog. Each element in Ellis' paintings is amplified by a contour that reverberates in multiple colors. These elements then layer, one upon another, building to a pulsating, spectacular grandeur, as breathtaking as it is breath-giving.

Christopher Grimes Gallery, 916 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 587-3373, through July 1. Closed Sundays and Mon-