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Jennifer Steinkamp at Lehmann Maupin
By Lilly Wei

Los Angeles-based Jennifer Steinkamp, a new-media artist of great technical finesse, has reprised and refined the dancing trees she projected so spectacularly onto the historic walls of the sixth-century Yerebatan Cistern at last year's Istanbul Biennial. While it seemed that no other site could be as breath-taking as the dark, colonnaded, underground reservoir built by the Romans, Steinkamp, with this equally mesmerizing white-box presentation, proved that it was not merely the grandeur of the Cistern that made her work the showstopper that it was.

Dervish, her latest project, was inspired by the whirling dervishes of the Mehlavi sect of Sufism, founded by the Persian poet Rumi. Each of the four digitally animated video projections occupied its own wall and consisted of an image of a single, sensuously swaying tree that scaled the height of the gallery. Seemingly rooted to the floor, the slender branches twisted and turned ecstatically, first one way, then another, in a charged, rhythmically repetitive choreography that was utterly hypnotic.

The luminous trees appeared as if glass-blown, from bare to tender green and rose, to autumnal incandescence, representing the seasons. They glowed like apparitions against a black ground that dissolved the walls of the gallery, restructuring the space into haunting, infinity mode. Steinkamp created a fiction so convincing that the visual gyrations seemed to create a breeze, the collision of intangible, crystalline leaves almost audible. There may be the danger that it's too beautiful, but even so, it's nearly impossible to resist its eye-catching, Rumi-esque "sweet-madness."