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## Cosmic Bulls 'Appearing' at Marble Palace

By Christa Lee Rock  
STAFF WRITER

The bull emerges from the canvas, rising back from the finely sketched snout like a snort of golden-white steam. He is an inverse shadow, the type that gallops across Native American skylines, hauntingly and powerfully good. In a moment, he could vanish, back into the seemingly unbounded red canvas.

And this is just one bull. They abound in the work of American artist Sheila Isham, whose "Cosmic Earth Bull Series" opened Friday at the Marble Palace. Bulls huddle together, their expansive, flat bodies forming a herded patchwork of meditative color, or swimming in a sea of sketched, liminal forms. Flat-backed and perpetually horizontal, the bulls draw the eye down to an evened, earth-level space in a harmonious, Zen-like way.

If that sounds mystical, it is. But that's the work of Isham, who began exploring the spirituality of abstract art, only to



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Isham and curator Alexander Borovsky standing before one of her mythical works. have mythic, anthropomorphic figures "appear" in her later work.

"I got back from a trip to India, pulled out a white canvas, and these bull forms started," said Isham in an interview Friday. "I was not interested in doing bull paintings ... but I didn't fight the impulse." From 1989 to 1994 she painted more than 60 bulls on enormous, 200-centimeter canvases. Only later did she develop the reasoning behind it: The bull is an archetypal form, she says, a symbol of both protection and virility, present even in the early cave paintings.

As for her own origins, Isham was born in New York, trained as an artist in 1950's Berlin and given worldly wisdom through her extended stays in Haiti, India, Hong Kong and Russia where her husband worked in the U.S. foreign service. Having lived in 1950's Moscow where police harassed her for drawing in the streets, Isham is eager to see what Russians are dreaming up to paint on their own new white canvases.

"I'm interested in places where there's been a void in art, where it's been blocked or stymied," said Isham.