

Cunning painter of 'smart set'

Art/ David Elliott

WHEN PAUL LaMantia told me he loved the movie "Altered States," I was not surprised. That gassy trip-flick has the same high voltage as his paintings, which are showing at Zaks Gallery, 620 N. Michigan. Though the Chicagoan's work is familiar here, it never loses its zapping impact.

The new paintings and drawings continue his fixation with fantastic females. With their carnivorous insect heads, rocketing breasts cased in the

cones of Jane Russell brasierres, and hip-swivelled posturings, they are head-horror vamps. They are "cocky" queens of a space that is viscous with explosive matter, in which the male sex is likely to be broken up in a furnace of electrical violence.

LaMantia does more than barnstorm. He's a prodigious cartographer of flashing energies. He takes the loaded soup of the surrealist Matta, and heats it to a Chicago boil of sexual comedy. His colors, all finesse but seldom decorative, match and mix with tremendous verve. In his own weird realm, he is a master. (Through April 25.)