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ROBERTA SMITH, Art in Review

Spray!

Polly Apfelbaum / Nicole Cherubini: *Studiowork*

Despite the time of year, the title of the group show “Spray!” does not refer to the ocean. Its 11 works span four decades of aerosol-can painting, reaching back to a 1963 drawing by the sculptor David Smith. “Spray!” finds an excellent partner in a small show of recent works by Polly Apfelbaum and Nicole Cherubini — already a good pairing. The total energetically explores artistic process, color and abstraction in and around two dimensions.

Most of the works in “Spray!” are 21st century. Keltie Ferris combines spray can, paintbrush and stencil in the radiant “KF + CM 4EVER,” which suggests an aerial view of a city bathed in search lights. Katharina Grosse uses horizontal lines of brown spray paint to add tension to Rococo swathes of blue and white that resemble both clouds and waves. Robert Moskowitz uses black spray to enhance the smoky reality of the nearly abstract silhouette in “Stack.”

Sterling Ruby edges black clouds of spray with strips of photographs of darkened skies: nothingness frames nothingness. Somehow, Jacqueline Humphries ends up in the vicinity of a Rudolf Stingel painting kit. Stephen Prina’s “Push Comes to Love: Clear” is a white-on-white abstract silk screen on canvas; the only spray paint is a clear sealant applied at an autobody shop. Rosy Keyser’s “Imagined Edenic” is a small patch of loosely woven linen festooned with spurts of red and blue, like bunting.

Works from the 1970s by Jules Olitski and Yayoi Kusama fill in some spray-painting history, and Dan Christensen, who died in 2007, provides what

must be one of its landmarks. His “Pavo” from 1968 is the result of spraying giant off-kilter circles in several candy colors on a very large canvas. This loopy tangle — seemingly pressured by the painting’s edges — resembles a stop-action image of several Hula-Hoops on the loose or the track of a spinning top seen from above. It confirms the ease and flair with which Mr. Christensen, who was something of an art star in the 1960s, assimilated Process Art into painting. Its Beach Boys brilliance would hold its own among works by Jackson Pollock or Sigmar Polke, to name but two.

Speaking of Pollock, in the project space, Ms. Cherubini is showing new glazed-ceramic wall pieces that appear to have been squashed and then slurred with color. Their directness is a refreshing departure from her freestanding vessels that can sometimes seem overlaid with historical references and eclectic materials.

Ms. Apfelbaum has as usual commandeered the floor but is also trying a new tack. Working in a manner reminiscent of the colored-glass technique of milles fleurs, she has fashioned small, smooth, brightly patterned panels she calls Feelies from contrasting shades of polymer and plasticine clay. There is a cuteness factor here, but it is quickly overruled by the blazing colors, assorted stripes, dots, checks, swirls and grids and abstract intelligence evident in the 200- plus examples.

Through Aug. 13th at D’Amelio Terras, 525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea; (212) 352-9400.