

# ARTFORUM

MARCH 2006

## Polly Apfelbaum

D'AMELIO TERRAS GALLERY

Trends in contemporary art come and go with brisk regularity, yet pushing the boundaries between painting and sculpture is a perennial fascination. Polly Apfelbaum surfs this never-breaking wave with consummate skill, making “bi-formalism” a leitmotif of her floor-bound fabric installations, which have sometimes been referred to as “fallen paintings.” For much of the past decade, this painterly allusion has been grounded in Apfelbaum’s quasi-Expressionist patterning of high-intensity color on synthetic velvet. The cartoonlike floral images that animate her most recent installations flash back to Pop art—Andy Warhol’s flower paintings come to mind—but also establish links with contemporary painting, particularly the loopy doodling style of Laura Owens.

Whether the numerous component parts of Apfelbaum’s works (their fragmentation makes them feel more theatrical than “pure” painting) are scattered loosely about, pooled around the edges of walls and the corners of doorways, or arranged in a sharply defined rectangle like an area rug, the logic of her practice still resides in the conviction that there’s no going back to the idea of the art object as irrefutably singular or easily contained.

What looks solid from a distance in *Cartoon Garden (Black and White)*, 2005, dissolves into a dizzying number of pieces comprising a puzzle painting designed to “fall” in a slightly different way every time it’s presented. It’s as though Apfelbaum is celebrating the death of painting and the loss of the original simultaneously. A densely layered rectangle of images of flowers, the work bursts with delirious harmony. Bouncing with kindergarten energy, it’s not so much upbeat as borderline hysterical. But unlike previous flower field pieces, all of which are charged with riotous color, the animated effects of *Cartoon Garden* are

Polly Apfelbaum,  
*Cartoon Garden*  
(*Black and White*),  
2005, synthetic fabric  
and dye, 13 x 25’.



delivered in graphic black-and-white—and that changes everything.

Unexpectedly, Apfelbaum’s cartoon garden here reads as camouflage, triggering memories of downtown gardens coated with ash in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and suggesting the pervasiveness of conflict. The shift away from color might also represent the defusing of camouflage’s militaristic associations in the wake of its widespread appropriation by fashion design. Either way, it’s a dark departure from the more purely decorative feel of previous projects: Narrative and associative fragments here merge and shift, their metaphoric weight fluctuating with apparent unpredictability as the genre of landscape painting, to which they loosely belong, is subject to complex interrogation. Is this just a blip on an otherwise bucolic screen, or a promise of more, and darker, gardens to come?

—Jan Avgikos

# ARTnews

March 2006

## Polly Apfelbaum

D'Amelio Terras

Polly Apfelbaum uses the term “fallen paintings” to describe her large-scale arrangements of hundreds of dyed and cut pieces of fabric, which seem to have slipped off the walls and onto the floor in pools of brilliant color. In this show, “Cartoon Garden,” the artist traded

her typically flamboyant, abstract blobs of color for figurative elements—flowers, bones, eyes—drawn in black ink on white velvet.

The centerpiece of the show, and easily the best work in it, was the carpet of flowers titled *Cartoon Garden (Black + White)*, 2005, which stretched nearly wall to wall across the floor of the main gallery.

Each flower was

made by drawing a simple curlicue on plush synthetic cloth and cutting it around its outline. Yet when seen together, laid out like an enormous doily, it became apparent that the flowers were remarkably varied: each was unique in shape and size and distinguished by subtle differences in the weight and tone of the inked line and the shade of the white cloth behind it. The scale of the piece and its appearance of random proliferation echoed an organic quality found in the artist's previous work. At the same time, it was obviously constructed and synthetic, graphic and decorative, its rectangular format suggesting a formal garden

border, a drawing, or a photograph. Several of Apfelbaum's oversized Polaroids of similar flower compositions hung in adjacent rooms, underscoring her interest in other mediums.

Two smaller pieces included in the show—a rectangular grouping of almond-shaped eyes that looked like a flotilla of little boats and a flattened jumble of dog bones—didn't have the same presence as the flowers. Apfelbaum's work is best with an enveloping sense of scale.

—Hilarie M. Sheets



Polly Apfelbaum, *Cartoon Garden (Black + White)*, 2005, synthetic fabric and dye, 13' x 25'. D'Amelio Terras.

# NEW YORKER

ART

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

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**POLLY APFELBAUM** Apfelbaum's signature dyed fabric scraps arranged like pools of color on the floor riff on everything from Pollock's horizontally composed paintings to minimalist floor sculpture to ornate decorative rugs. Here, however, she limits her palette to black-and-white and appropriates the zany, curly-lined drawing style of cartoons. Bones, eyes, and a long "garden" of flat white flowers are drawn in simple black outlines. Problem is, color is Apfelbaum's forte, and it's missing in these anemic works. Plus, the concept of cartoons on the floor doesn't carry much weight compared to deftly and simultaneously nodding to Carl Andre and Persian carpets. Through Dec. 23. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

**fashionoffice.org**

November 2005



**POLLY APFELBAUM: Cartoon Garden**

November 10 - December 23 2005, D'Amelio Terras

[www.damelioterras.com](http://www.damelioterras.com)

**fig.:** **Cartoon Garden, Polly Apfelbaum, 2005, synthetic velvet and fabric dye, detail**

*"Apfelbaum's work is both painting and sculpture, perhaps photography and fashion and formless material process as well. It is all these things –wildly so and wildly not so."* Lane Relyea states in *What Does Love Have to Do With It*

Where does the flower grow? The *fallen paintings* are on the right place: on the floor. The pieces of dyed fabrics and sculptured papers are arranged on the floor into large-scale fields. Apfelbaum breaks with painting's traditional territory of wall and canvas.

Apfelbaum explores the graphic quality of drawing. The reduction of her mostly colorful work to black and white for this exhibition centres the view to the composition (figural/geometric) and the variation of the line. The sheets of paper are sculptured into a rectangle and supports in this way the drawing - sculpture supports the medium!