

Art in Review

Abstract Abstract

*Foxy Production
623 West 27th Street
Chelsea
Through Oct. 10*

The double title of "Abstract Abstract" implies multiple possibilities for a familiar language or using it at a remove, several generations out. Either way this show brings together seven young, mostly unknown artists who make two-dimensional works generally devoid of recognizable forms. It is unusually lively be-

cause the diversity of their work is not just stylistic, but also physical and methodological.

Heather Cook paints by dipping pieces of fabric in bleach, creating patterns and pours on top of monochromatic or striped grounds that are then simply hung on the wall. Hilary Harnischfeger paints and carves thick laminations of paper and plaster embedded with glass and quartz into almost geological contours. Xylor Jane uses complex counting systems of her own devising to bring new (obsessive) life to the abstract staples of line and grid. Michael Bell-Smith reiterates, digitally, the fronts of the composition books that Roy Lichtenstein introduced into art, adding another layer of mechanical reproduction to a found abstraction while making it seem impenetrable, like a drawing by Bruce Conner.

Gabriel Hartley, one of the show's standouts, resorts to old-fashioned oil on canvas, worked robustly into loose patterns, rough surfaces and sparkling colors (with an occasional suggestion of still life that looks surprisingly fresh, even in this company). Max Pitegoff and Travess Smalley practice gestural and sometimes hard-edged abstraction on the computer, riffing generations of ersatz motifs to make images they call posters, which can resemble gouaches. Iliia Ovechkin also works digitally, keeping every dot, squiggle and brushstroke of fictional paint spatially distinct in a slightly trompe l'oeil manner that used to be called abstract illusionism.

Taken together, the work in this show foment optimism about something like painting used to pursue something like abstraction.

ROBERTA SMITH