

Art in Review

FRIDAY, AUGUST 8, 2008

Painting

Now and Forever, Part II

Greene Naftali
508 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Matthew Marks Gallery
522 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through Aug. 15

"Painting: Now and Forever, Part II" exudes enough skepticism to evade the Valentine sincerity of its title. Ranging through several generations and numerous styles and methods, it includes works by more than three dozen 20th- and 21st-century artists, living and dead. For what it's worth, the show's news release notes that none of them, except Mary Heilmann, were in the first version of this show, organized 10 years ago by the Matthew Marks Gallery and the late, lamented Pat Hearn Gallery.

This time the Marks gallery has teamed up with Greene Naftali. Both are filled to the brim with what might be called "painting and its discontents," and although they form one exhibition, the displays are as different as the galleries themselves.

The arrangements at Greene Naftali, especially, convey the impression that the only way to take painting seriously is to treat it as some kind of joke. The show's first small gallery can be read as a playful ode to early Modernism, beginning with a small, Fauve-like landscape by Paul Thek, which has a gold frame that includes a little lamp, and proceeding to the pure early-1970s abstractions of Poul Gernes, a Danish painter, designer and teacher who thought art should improve everyday life.

The main gallery presents a version of the continuing free-for-all between figurative and abstract, and between paint on canvas and something else. Figuration and canvas are in the minority.

A rectangle of carpet brushed with fluorescent orange by Mike Kelley stands out, as does Kelley Walker's optically and physically odd four-color silkscreen. It

presents a triptych of red and white brick walls whose cement interstices have been masked with cut-out newspaper print: ephemeral life lived in the cracks, or perhaps a reversal of Jasper Johns's use of newspaper in his early paintings.

Even more reduced is R. H. Quayman's tightly wound moiré bull's-eye (also a silkscreen), which hangs next to Sergej Jensen's Minimalist "Werewolf," in which little threads of saffron suggest scattered whiskers.

In additional tiny galleries three terrific, suppurating versions of the Mona Lisa by the Austrian collective Gelitin grab the eye by its lapels; Stephen Pina, Isa Genzken and Ugo Rondinone make varying use of spray paint; and finally, Ellsworth Kelly, a Marks artist, adds a dose of Mandarin rigor with "Green Relief," a 2007 work that hangs in splendid solitude.

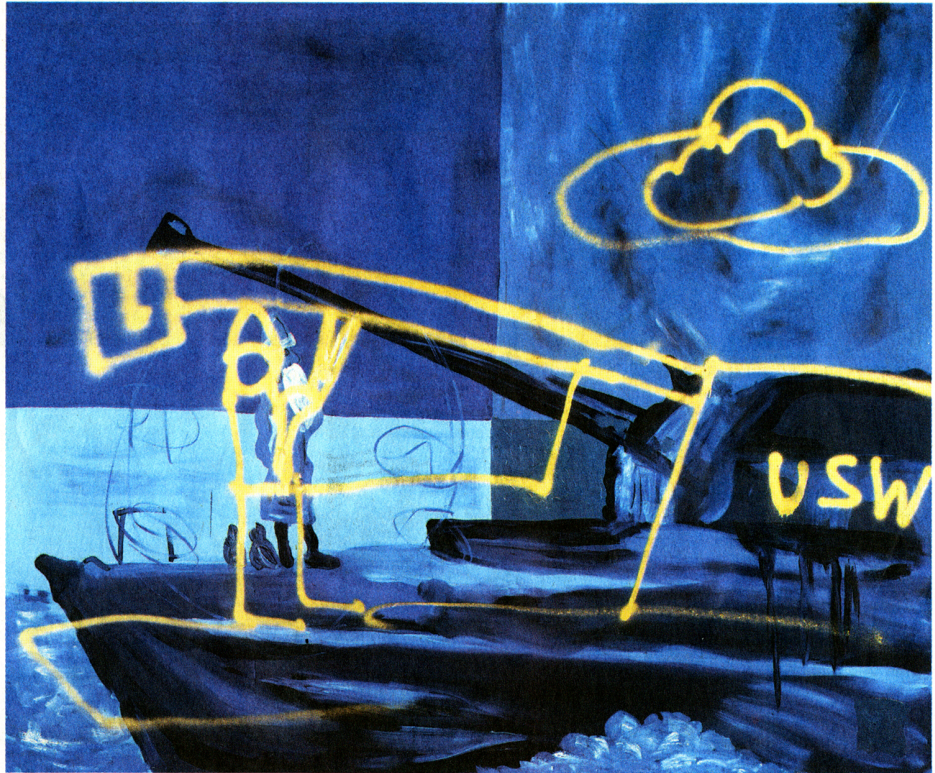
Despite opening with a wall painting by Lily van der Stokker, things are considerably more hushed at Marks. The large gallery mixes usual and unusual suspects. Abstraction dominates, as do canvas and other stretched fabrics, along with an air of studied nonchalance, especially in works by Michael Majerus, Mi-

chael Krebber, Blinky Palermo and Reena Spaulings (spots of red wine on a tablecloth — how daring).

Rodney Graham's little confectionery abstractions remind us how many nonpainters end up painting (as does a work on canvas by the structuralist filmmaker Paul Sharits at Greene Naftali). Fuzzy rings of color by the Op artist Wojciech Fangor counter the bright burn of late work by Jack Goldstein, which is in turn reflected in a painting by Katharina Fritsch that is really a mirror.

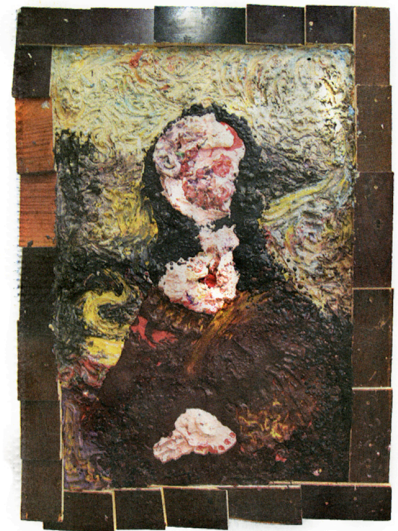
Three smaller side-chapel-like galleries are devoted to a progression of artists with Minimalist leanings: the colored steles of Anne Truitt, the slathered process paintings of Ms. Heilmann and finally a series of big, stuttering black inkjet X's on white linen by Wade Guyton that pledge allegiance to painting while crossing their fingers behind their backs. His attitude is seconded in more Expressionist terms by a separate display of 14 new paintings by Josh Smith in the adjacent Marks space.

ROBERTA SMITH



COURTESY OF MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY AND GREENE NAFTALI GALLERY

"Untitled" (1991), by Martin Kippenberger, in "Painting: Now and Forever, Part II" at the Marks and Greene Naftali galleries.



GREENE NAFTALI GALLERY, NEW YORK

"Untitled" (2008), by Gelitin, the Austrian art collective.