

Pleasures in rich pools of color

A powerful debut at Braunstein/Quay

Kenneth Baker
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Nellie King Solomon's work at Braunstein/Quay fits no definition of painting.

But anyone who wants to defend it as art must refer to the paintings of such people as Sam Francis, Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler.

In "as is" (2001), pools of blood red have been deposited on one or both sides of large abutted, unframed sheets of heavy Mylar.

The object list specifies "ink and medium" as the material in play, but that gives us little to go on in deciding how to relate this work to what we intuitively accept as painting, abstract or not.

Solomon's tools and techniques leave no clear traces of their nature. We cannot even distinguish her materials' expressive qualities from the merely inertial.

Is that rich red meant to make us think of blood or merely to make us feel how inescapable such loaded associations are?

The flux and bleed of pigment in Solomon's tall, narrow "Strips" (2001) recall the marks left by melting ice in Andy Goldsworthy's icicle "drawings." But the "Strips" also stir vague recollections of Asian hanging scroll paintings.

Finally only the sheer unforced lushness of Solomon's works -- of those that appear least manipulated, anyway -- overcomes the tension that may arise from uncertainty about their art status. Whatever the mind says, the eye out for pleasure says yes to the drift, looseness and generosity of Solomon's work.

Her show is a powerful debut that will be hard for her to follow.

Wolberger in two venues

The work of San Franciscan Yoram Wolberger links two otherwise unconnected shows at Catherine Clark and Refusalon.

His pieces at Clark recall Jasper Johns' famous recipe for art: "Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it. . . . etc."

To make "Refrigerator" (2001), Wolberger took a small fridge, removed its innards and somehow sliced its metal shell into segments just thick enough that they can still stand. He then reinstalled the freezer unit, which churns away pointlessly within the slivered appliance.

In "Hutch" (2001) at Clark, Wolberger cut a whole wooden breakfront into inch-thick slices that now stand slumped against a wall like a shelfload of books with one bookend removed.

At Refusalon, Wolberger shows a "Toy Soldier" (2001) magnified by digital scan from a miniature original into a life-size green monstrosity with irregular fins of resin betraying the molding process that produced it. The figure's imperfections insult our sense of the human form as a heroic subject for sculpture almost as much as its formulaic militarism does.

Wolberger upstages work by other artists at both galleries that in any other setting might well stand out.

Reuben Lorch-Miller's "Skylights" (2001) at Clark projects color video of cloud-dappled sky upon two rectangular slabs on the floor. Content seems to drift into and through them along with the passing clouds. These "Skylights" sit midway between minimalist floor pieces and the paintings of Rene Magritte in which bright sky breaks into blocky geometry.

Art

NELLIE KING SOLOMON: Paintings. Ends today. Braunstein /Quay Gallery, 430 Clementina St., San Francisco. (415) 278-9850.

YORAM WOLBERGER, REUBEN LORCH-MILLER: Sculpture, works in mixed media. Through next Saturday. Catherine Clark Gallery, 49 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 399-1439.

BY APPOINTMENT: Works in various media by Douglas Argue, Tommy Becker, Michael Goedeke and Erik Saks, Felipe Dulziades, Erez Golan, Sarah Hughes, Rebecca E. Miller, Geof Oppenheimer, Christopher O'Connor, Chris Perez and Yoram Wolberger. Through Tuesday. Refusalon, 20 Hawthorne St., San Francisco. (415) 546-0158.

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