

Byron Coleman, critic of Andy Warhol, wrote about Petra Mattes in Gallery&Studio, New York:

If the paintings of the widely exhibited and collected German artist Petra Mattes are any indication, they may be a new species of abstraction brewing in the land of Neo-Expressionism. Either that, or Mattes's work is more unique than it struck us initially, on viewing her paintings in the 2007 year-round salon exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 547 West 27th Street, in Chelsea.

One of the most innovative things about Mattes's paintings is how successfully she synthesizes seemingly disparate tendencies. For while the general thrust of her compositions is somewhat minimalist, often with overall elements dispersed over generally monochromatic color fields, her vigorous paint handling results in a wide variety of subtle visual incident.

Indeed, one cannot recall having recently encountered another painter who merges geometry and gesture quite so compellingly. Thus, on closer viewing one can't help arriving at the conclusion that Mattes's Expressionist heritage may be more deeply ingrained than one might have thought. This seems especially evident in her 2002 work entitled „N.Y.C.“, a diptych consisting of two tall, narrow adjoining canvases that inescapably evoke the Twin Towers of the world Trade Center, destroyed in the terrorist attack of a year earlier.

The surfaces of both panels come alive with layered hues applied in the textual scumbling technique at which Mattes excels.

In contrast to the variegated, scored and scratched hues that enliven most of the surface, with brilliant yellows bleeding through deeper, darker earth colors, the bottom of the left hand panel is covered by a more or less solid area of fiery red. This panel is also somewhat narrower than the one on the right, in which the colors are more homogenous and smoothly blended, creating a contrasting sense of density and weight to counterbalance the chromatic brilliance of its counterpart.

For all their coloristic and textural sumptuousness, however, the two adjoining panels of this work project a somber mood, in keeping with the timbre of the terrible event to which they so powerfully allude. Without being in the least bit obvious or mawkish, „N.Y.C.“, comes across as an affecting tribute to a stricken city, stately and moving, possessed of a quiet dignity that hints at the monumental. Much of its power, as in other works by Mattes, lies in the artist's gift of understatement, even as she expresses a remarkable range of emotions in an abstract context.

Along with the color, texture plays a vital part in her visual vocabulary, as seen in another (untitled) work at Montserrat Gallery, in which she achieves a tactile surface with oil, crushed stones, and acrylic on canvas. She obviously likes to explore the expressive and poetic qualities of texture, as well as its purely physical attributes, to seduce the viewer on the different levels simultaneously. Yet the most notable aspect of her art is its formal exquisiteness, which comes across whether she is creating a composition based on geometric forms or freely indulging her gift for pure gesture.

For Petra Mattes possesses an unusually broad visual vocabulary for an abstract artist, ranging from austere linear compositions, to densely saturated surfaces animated by a variety of strokes, marks and drips. Yet that her paintings are always readily identifiable seems to prove the truth of an old adage:

„style is character“.