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ART IN REVIEW; Jane Fine -- 'After Sugar Time'

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Much of the pleasure in studying Jane Fine's infectiously playful paintings of cartoon worlds on the brink of chaos comes from following visually in her improvisational footsteps. Working on smooth plywood panels, Ms. Fine begins by painting flat, gridded compositions, leaving most of the wood exposed. Then she pours incompletely mixed paint onto the surface, creating thick, woozily striated, taffy-colored puddles. (Sometimes she skips the hard-edged underpainting and goes straight to the pouring.)

Finally, with black marking pens, she adds all sorts of graphic marks that transform the poured, dripped and splattered paint into fantasy landscapes of war, like those an elementary school boy might draw, with fortresses, tanks and fighter planes. The mark-making serves a dual purpose in that while it draws you close for examination of all the nutty details -- gun barrels, targets, puffs of smoke, flowers, nails and surface texturing -- it also engages you in the lush physicality of the paint.

Like Carroll Dunham, whose ferociously funky paintings come to mind, Ms. Fine seems less concerned with real world wars than with playing out her own inner tensions: between the serious and the comic, the physical and the imaginative, the neat and the messy, the transcendental and the terrestrial. That's what makes her paintings psychologically as well as sensuously compelling.

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