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Art in Review

By ROBERTA SMITH

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Jane Fine's bright, cartoonish abstractions, seen in the painter's first solo exhibition, are an improvement over her previous group-show efforts. Ms. Fine has heightened her colors, eliminated some of the clunkiness that characterized her elaborate compositions and gained more control of her odd mix of the biomorphic, the gestural and the latently geometric. Her dense aggregates of piled and stepped shapes alternate with dripped and scumbled areas and insinuations of toon reality (a schematic flower here, a nail's head there). It's the Hanging Towers of Babylon filtered through a Disney-crazed sensibility, the goal being consistency built out of inconsistency, an all-over energy made of myriad details, each as carefully considered as the next. This kind of anti-heroic approach to painting has many practitioners, most prominently Lari Pittman, but also Amy Sillman and Betsy Kaufmann.

Nonetheless, the paintings seem overly busy, with too many small parts that seem simply to have been lobbed onto the surface. And the artist needs to make the contrasts between her various painting methods more distinct: mostly, they just blend. A series of sparser watercolors in the gallery's office suggests Ms. Fine's imagery gains strength from pruning.

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