

Charles Andresen GUIDED BY INVOICES

This selection of works by Charles Andresen, curated by Chris Byrne, was subtitled “Paintings 2001–2011,” though seven of the eight were dated between 2007 and 2011, with just one from 2001. But the dates hardly seemed to matter; in this oeuvre, consistency trumps development, so if all the dates were scrambled, you’d never notice the difference. And I suspect this would have been true even if the chronological scope of the exhibition had been greater. The work on hand was made according to a procedure Andresen has been using since at least 1996, when Richmond Burton described it in a text written for an exhibition he curated for apexart in New York: Andresen “begins with a pool of gel floating in a basin. The artist then takes squeeze bottles filled with paint and squirts the paint into the gel, creating the color and the design of the image. Once he is satisfied with the result, the paint is scooped from the basin and thrown as a unit against the canvas.” In other words, he essentially “draws” with wet-into-wet colors, then distorts his drawing (usually fairly basic linear or dotted patterns) by flinging it onto the canvas—a distinctive twist on the familiar-enough interplay between intention and accident as well as on the vocabulary of gestural painting. Andresen has devised a technique for himself that he has presumably found sufficiently dependable yet sufficiently flexible that he’s been able to keep exploring its potential without need for dramatic change.

Luckily, Andresen seems more interested in the potential than in the technique. There is nothing formulaic about the way he structures his paintings; they are “overall” in the sense that they are nonhierarchical—with points of intensity distributed throughout the rectangle but not uniformly—yet they don’t fall into homogeneity. And the handling of color is full of surprises, particularly in those works that more nearly approach monochromy. *O’odham Rhythm*, 2001 (Andresen has a weakness for punning titles; this one’s an impenetrable play on that of a landmark painting by Jackson Pollock) is woven together mainly of gooey butterscotch and caramel tones; *Gelb*, 2007, as its German title attests, is predominantly shades of yellow. Particularly adept in the latter is Andresen’s way of putting slight differences in hue to dramatic spatial effect. But he can also use contrasting colors in distinctive ways. *Frozen Jesters*, 2011, with its twisting ribbons of parallel lines of



Charles Andresen,
Frozen Jesters, 2011,
acrylic on canvas,
44 x 38".

various colors and white, achieves a sort of pointillist-by-other-means evenness of tone despite what could easily have been its fulsome-ness of color. And it’s curious to see how the eight red splotches in *Gong*, 2010, actually seem to coalesce to evoke a sense of background, though they are clearly no such thing, just up-front patches of paint like all the others.

If I have a complaint about these paintings, it’s to do with the plasticky quality of the worked-up globs of acrylic, which I can’t help finding rather disagreeable. True, this exaggerated artificiality, sometimes verging on the grotesque, is arguably the only way in which the paintings swerve away from the potential for nostalgia inherent in their adherence to Abstract Expressionist gesturalism. But less important than the paintings’ material character is the panache with which Andresen subsumes not only their blobby, relieflike surfaces but also their disfigured patterning within a single complex color experience.

—Barry Schwabsky