

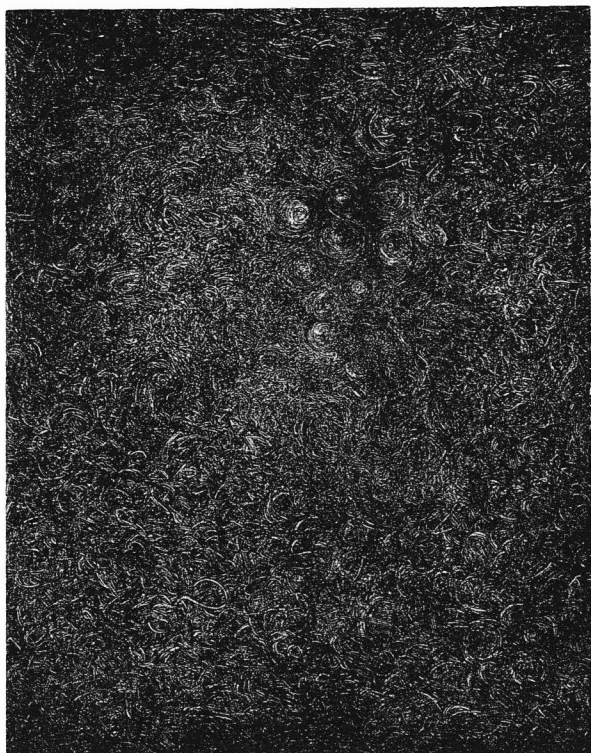
series, is subtly menacing: a moiré of poisonous green chemicals on dark water, or the disruptive patterns of electronic interference.

The surfaces of the abstract works are pictorially rich and complex: dragged, scored, smeared, erased, painted over, peeled off, blistered, splattered. Yet, typically, what seems to be gesture is not; the skin is all contrivance, freezing spontaneity and sensation. On the other hand, a brooding, melancholic quality emerges from these distressed, distanced paintings, a lack of certainty, a nervous edge. These are glimpses of a lost Romantic tradition, and they carry a nostalgia for imagery, as well as for history. This is not new territory for the artist, but it is, as always, compelling.

—Lilly Wei

Kathy Muehleemann at Pamela Auchincloss

Painted on panel, each of Kathy Muehleemann's new paintings presents a black or dark gray ground covered with fine white lines applied with a narrow brush to create a myriad of little whorls. Looking like drawing or even scratching, the lines have



Kathy Muehleemann: *Fable No. 4 (Enchantment)*, 1993, oil on panel, 14 by 11 inches; at Pamela Auchincloss.

just enough substance to give a sense of physicality, though not enough to enter into any dialogue with surface. The result can evoke a closeup of a section of a Baroque engraving, as in *Fable No. 4 (Enchantment)*, which suggests a sight up through clouds to glory. In almost every picture a vaguely delimited form emerges from darker, more shadowy areas. That each is the realization of a particular vision is suggested not only by their titles, which typically point to some narrative content, but also by the variations played on the shared theme of space given structure by value contrast.

Though the metaphor of illumination is basic to these pictures, like neutron stars they don't emit light but keep it in. The compulsiveness of the little gesture out of which they are made lends them a private, even hermetic character, and the push of this compulsion against the narrow range of overall effect is what gives Muehleemann's paintings their power. In this constrained company a picture like *Ragged Shepp*, made with slightly looser swirls of white, almost offers a breath of fresh air.



Gerhard Richter: *794-1 Abstract Painting*, 1993, oil on canvas, 94 1/4 inches square; at Marian Goodman.

A selection of monotypes presented an interesting point of comparison. In three the artist used red paint rather than white, bringing drama and warmth to her enterprise while evoking such tropes of sublimity as fire or sunset clouds. The black-and-white monotypes also included here are no less lively, however; it's the medium itself that seems to have freed the artist's hand, allowing a greater variety of touch and form. (One of the monotypes goes so far as to nearly eliminate the circular whorls in favor of a freer assembly of marks.)

This is paradoxical work, confining an expressive mode of gesture within narrow bounds, picturing the vast spaces of heaven and hell in what reads as grisaille. The titles (such as *Ancient Bramble* and *Avernus*) call up worlds of myth, which the images attempt to fill with radically limited means. One waits for the heat confined in these paintings to make itself felt more directly.

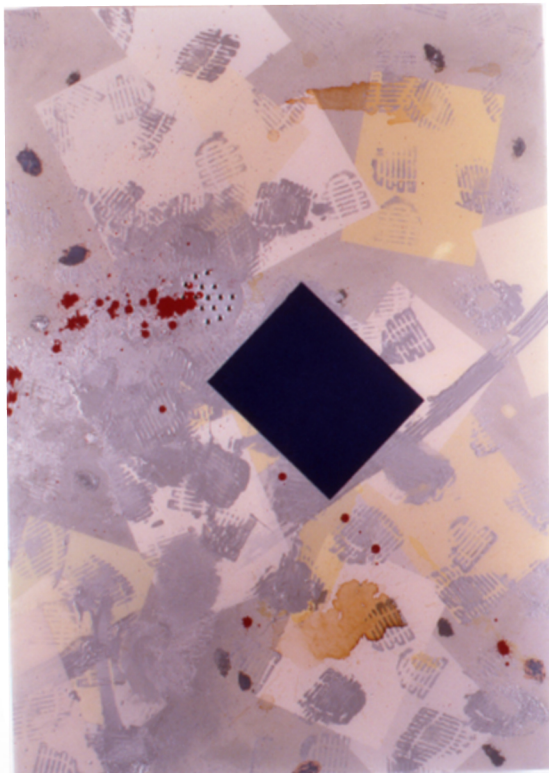
—Paul Mattick, Jr.

L.C. Armstrong at John Post Lee

Nothing is explicit in L.C. Armstrong's paintings and sculptures, where suspicious objects and marks merely suggest the residue of violent events. Even where the materials are quite literal-

ly explosive—bullets, bomb fuses—they have been subsumed within cool formal concerns. Armstrong knows that in order to connect back to the suffering body, the evidence must come as a surprise. A ground of raking rectangles in gold, white and gray, looking like a '50s linoleum kitchen floor (*Autumn in New York*), has been shot at with bullets, some of which remain embedded in star-shaped holes. Look carefully, the artist suggests in *Faux Pas*, and you will find traces of misdeeds: droplets of deep red, for example, splattered near a collaged bathroom drain. Bullets, details of domestic interiors and stains become clues to an irrecoupable narrative caught within transparent resin surfaces.

Faux Pas has been trodden upon by the artist's paint-soaked soles and splashed by the artist's coffee. She is everywhere restlessly implicated, and she brings the viewer along for the indictment. At the center, near the drain, is a sheet of carbon paper. If I stand just so, my face is reflected in the dark blue, further embedding subjectivity in this already intensely personal work. The glassy surface, however, along with a wintry palette and an overall formal rigor, seems to place feelings at a remove. "Without being silent, I was elsewhere," writes Genet.



L.C. Armstrong: *Faux Pas*, 1993, mixed mediums, 48 by 34 inches; at John Post Lee.

Emotional disassociation prevails, even as witnessing is unavoidable.

Armstrong is freshening the lessons of abstraction, like a number of other painters who showed last season (Cora Cohen, Byron Kim, etc.) From a distance, the delicate silver loops in *Autumn in New York* play Pollock; the indigo carbon paper of *Double Take*, Reinhardt. It doesn't always work. *Double Take*, with six rows of eight sheets of carbon paper, offers a shifting, liquid grid inside the resin, but lacks the visceral impact of other paintings. Through her bodily habitation of abstraction Armstrong challenges modernism, even as she fashions a not unadmiring continuity. *Broadway Doggie Woggie*'s brown-smeared surface doubles as Ab-Ex homage and, you guessed it, New York's summer pavements. Armstrong shows some ambivalence toward her admitted inheritance.

Armstrong has been as much shown as a sculptor as a painter in her relatively new career. *Dead Lock* is a wheeled aluminum dolly carrying two stacks of latex sheets striped like notepads and tied down by two stockings, one black and one beige. Armstrong used the lined

latex sheets in a number of previous works (*Leda*, *Seven Times Seventy*). They feel like skin, suggesting a passive body awaiting its inscription in language. The knotted stockings intimate sadomasochism. Her "Road Scribbles" are retreads cast in bronze and subtitled for the location where they were found—Pulaski Bridge, Williamsburg Bridge. Funnier than the other work, their wit is nonetheless hedged by fatalism.

Armstrong is too savvy to take a literal route, as she eschews the sensational tactics of other contemporary artists who address issues of violence and the body (Kiki Smith, for example). Instead, her work maintains that the unspeakable is not representable, at least not directly, and that abstraction, once laden with content, can serve up a powerful testimony.

—Faye Hirsch

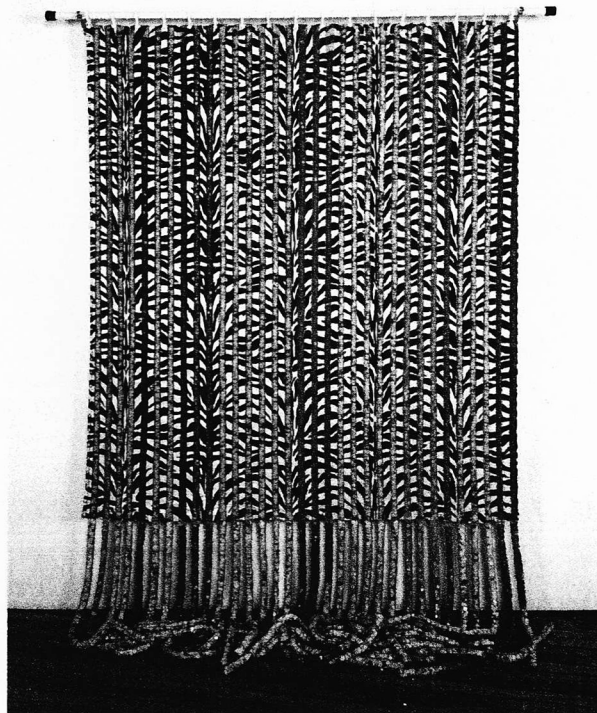
Lisa Hoke at Horodner Romley

Where once Hoke made work of fruits and vegetables cast in iron and cantilevered or suspended in commanding, gravity-defying gestures, she is now dealing in the objects of domestic life. Two of the pieces in this show begin with shower curtains, a red plas-

tic one in *Red Sky* and a zebra-striped number in *Plunge*. Both are cut vertically into regular strips, between which are sewn double thicknesses of tulle filled with assorted buttons. The stuffed strips extend past the bottom edge of the curtain down to the floor, where they end in snaky, button-filled tangles.

Like Hoke's recent *Interlocking Parallels* (on view concurrently at Exit Art), made of hundreds of zippers sewn together to form a dazzlingly unstable tapestry, the shower-curtain works pry open a simple, painterly plane and make it sculptural. It may be more than an incidental pun that these are curtain-wall structures, a term introduced in architecture to describe what happened to exterior walls when they no longer needed to be load-bearing. In fact, all of Hoke's work

using, rather than the balancing feats of her early work. But while her bath accessories and petticoat material can be measured by their expressive valences, they are not put together for narrative or polemical coherence. They are used instead to skew the perceptual experience of the work. This skew takes literal form in *Mouth to Mouth*, an uneasily inclined plane made of button-filled baby-food jars that are joined side-to-side with wax. It is an iconic image of the daily diligence required to nurture a growing body, evoked by the work's precarious attitude, its weight and fragility, and the cataclysm of buttons it holds at bay. Similarly, *Lifeline*, a column made from a medley of unmatched shirtsleeves waxed stiff, can be read as an ode to the simple, intensive labor involved in almost any kind of-



Lisa Hoke: *Plunge*, 1993, mixed mediums, 9 by 5 by 2 feet; at Horodner Romley.

can be said to involve pulling apart the fabric of conventional form and reassembling it in ways in which the old structural laws don't quite apply.

What now challenges these conventions is the emotional weight of the objects Hoke is

creative work. But this sculpture, too, works primarily by reconfiguring the space around it, offering a means of ascent that is as structurally weak as it is pictorially robust.

A renewed focus on the objects and chores of domestic