

## Just Dots: Four Walls at Display Unlimited

Meticulously composed yet abundant and sensuous, recent work by emerging artist Charlotte Smith grabs onto Georges Seurat's pointillistic concept of Sunday afternoon in the park and goes just for the dots.

Numbering only nine paintings and a wall-fixed installation, *Just Dots* was a small but exquisite exhibition at Four Walls at Displays Unlimited in Fort Worth. Smith's work combines the freshness of an emerging artist with an emotional and intellectual maturity, possibly because she was in her mid-40s when she began her formal studies.

Smith earned a bachelor's degree in general studies from the University of Texas at Dallas, in 1988, after abandoning architecture school more than a decade earlier. A few years later, she took up brushes and books on her own so that she could decorate the hospital walls with original paintings for her mother during a long illness. After studying in private art classes where she developed an affinity and a reputation for experimentation, she applied to graduate school. She earned a master of fine arts degree in painting and drawing from the University of North Texas School of Visual Arts in 1999.

In this exhibit, she demonstrated her affinity for repetitive mark-making, the roots of which may well be in the shading techniques introduced in her architectural drawing classes many years before.

For *Pile On*, Smith incorporates a tactile, all-over pattern of tiny dots that is the signature of her work. Beginning with a shining, candy-colored palette, Smith dips a toothpick or straight pin into thick, acrylic paint, applies the first dot to the board, this one measuring about six inches square. She applies the next pigment on top of the first until she has piled on five or six layers. While she organizes the dots around a subtle foundation of color, the layers of pigment tell the story of her process and her ability to engage the viewer in that process.

*Lots a Dot* gathers a mammoth collection of delicious pinks, blues, yellows, and a few spots of chewed-up gray into larger circles on a forty-inch square board. Some candy-pink is swirled with minty-white, making each one of these thousands of dots a moment unto itself.

Most of the sensuous dots of *Bubblelicious* cling to a torso like shadow painted on a 17-inch-by-22-inch board while others float freely, hinting more at a bubble bath than chewing gum. In *Stackadelic*, Smith unifies her elaborate, addictive palette through a sophisticated permutation of colors and their layering. Saturating the same sized board as *Bubblelicious*, if any dot in *Stackadelic* does have the same layering pattern as another, the viewer will likely start hallucinating before finding it.

In *Floppy Drop*, she allows the paint in the base dot to flow out in a larger, more irregular form, as well as leaving more space between the dots on a 15 X 15 inch

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square board. As a result, a more organic-looking structure grows from this widely spaced assembly of dots than in her other work. Some of the base dots are clear acrylic; others are white. She piles on black, white, or gray in this focused narrative. *Tongue Wagging*, which is the same size, also employs this juxtaposition of a strident color scheme with a bit of breathing room between the dots.

Smith ventures away from piled-on paint for her wall-sized installation, *Poke A Dot*. She swirls clear plastic to make hundreds of palm-sized discs. She applies a bit of clear blue, teal, sunny yellow, or green to some of the discs. By employing a dressmaker's pin to affix each dot about an inch from the wall, her signature layers come from reflected light instead.

The layers of energy in the reflected light suggest where Smith might be headed, as does a narrative element in two other works. Between the piled-on dots in *Spare Dots* and *Spare Dots II*, two small-scale works of acrylic on six-inch square boards, she pencils in a handful of outlines that suggest where future dots might go.

-Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe