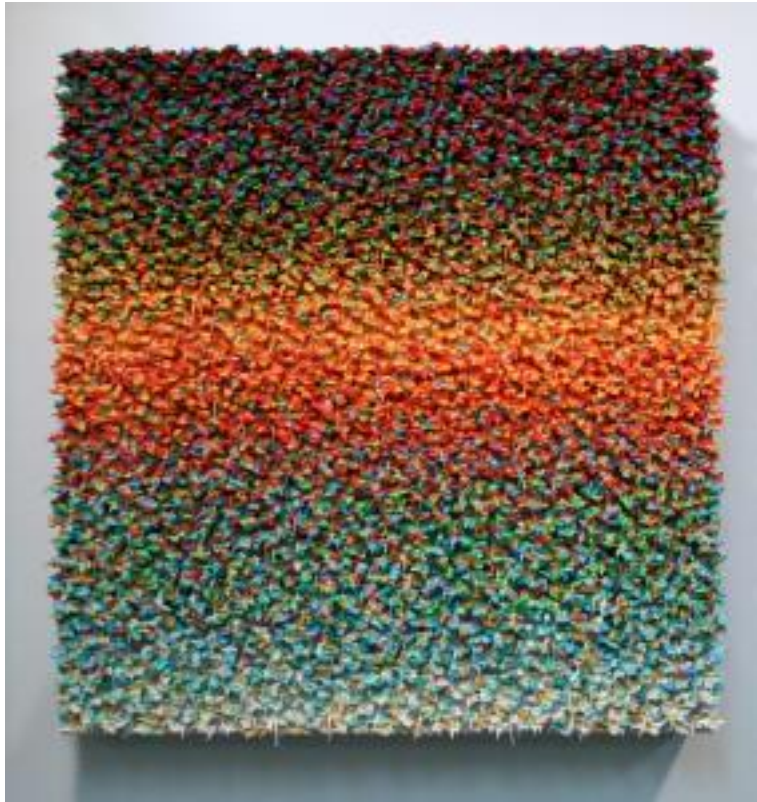


Robert Sagerman's scrumptious paintings, Claire Lieberman's piquant sculptures



Robert Sagerman's "10,004"

Good art galleries have a personality. To put it another way, good art dealers have a point of view. The creative use of materials is a running theme at Marcia Wood Gallery, for instance, and it finds diverse expression in the gallery's concurrent solo shows of Robert Sagerman and Claire Lieberman, on view through April 24.

Sagerman turns paint and color into objects. Wielding a palette knife, he lays paint impregnated with resins on canvas to build compositions some two inches thick. Each stroke has its own sculptural identity. It might peak like whipped egg whites, drip like a stalactite or pile up like shag carpet. Viewers can literally look into his paintings to see the colors that lie behind the surface marks.

Each canvas has its own palette, ranging from vibrant complementaries to monochrome. The New York artist might use as many as 50 colors and thousands of strokes to make a painting. We know this because he counts and records them all, a process that lies somewhere between obsession and yogic discipline. For him, it seems to be the path from the material to the spiritual.

Sagerman has taken to embedding a little monitor in some of the paintings that rehearses the counting. To my mind, and eye, this adds little to the experience. In fact it's a distraction, especially if, as he has said, painting is a vehicle to get beyond the knowable. I prefer to surrender to the sensuality of Sagerman's gorgeous paintings, without the clock ticking.



Claire Lieberman's "Sharpshooter"

Lieberman has earned a reputation for installations made of Jell-O and sculptures whose materials are at odds with their imagery to highlight cultural dislocations and cosmic ironies. A series of fanciful toy guns made of hand-blown glass is typical of her intentionally mixed metaphors. The child is the father of the man; playing with guns may not be as innocent as it seems.

The New York artist builds lots of contrasts into her wall pieces through her materials. She contrasts old-school alabaster and new-media video (stuffed animals in adult situations). Alabaster's permanence contrasts with the transience of the color-infused resin that stands in for Jell-O. Though they are composed like a Minimalist grid painting, playfulness and non-sequiturs deflate the self-seriousness of such works.

The cognitive dissonance that Lieberman creates is all in the family. You can see it in gallery artists Venske and Spanle's marble puddles, for example, and Susanna Starr's trompe l'oeil lace carved from wood veneer. The connections continue in the semi-permanent display of gallery artists in the former Gallery Stokes next door.

Catherine Fox is co-founder of ArtsATL.

—CATHERINE FOX