

Eleven  
Rivington



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CALL-AND-RESPONSE

By Stephen Maine

Art is work. But there is something irresistible about art that looks like someone had a good time making it. Now on view, two exuberant solo shows by accomplished, mid-career New York painters convey the pleasure they take in their very different approaches to materials and application. Jackie Saccoccio and Carolanna Parlato have been on their game long enough to know that the kind of statement they're looking to make arises not from the pursuit of novelty but from a focused and personal engagement with postwar abstraction, a kind of call-and-response with pictorial precedent. Both retool gestural abstraction — "painterly painting" — with hard-won self-assurance. That the still-expanding contemporary art market makes a place at the table for such an (until recently) unhip idiom inspires optimism.

At Eleven Rivington, Ms. Saccoccio's sixth, slightly overstuffed solo show includes seven vibrant, brushy oils ranging up to 8 feet across. It's called "Interrupted Grid," but that's an understatement — mangled, melted, and put through the wringer is more like it. While much of the mark-making at least vaguely echoes the horizontal or vertical edges of the canvas, the paintings look variously disassembled, shaken loose, or blown apart. The artist loves full-throttle color, utilizing not only high-key tube colors but good, old-fashioned earth tones and a healthy admixture of black and white. Her work is cinematic in its spatial complexity, and much more thinly painted than at first it seems (or appears to be in photographs).

"Slow Motion Grid" is one of three paintings in the show that rest on a rumbling dialogue between slapped-on patches of rich, reddish brown and blue-black, shot through with washes and wipings of yellow, pink, and brighter blue. The aggressive chroma radiates forward, and the painting looks backlit. "ILUVU Goodbye" and "I'm Feeling Feelings" function similarly on a larger scale, and court the chance effects of runny or pooling glazes. It's not clear whether the latter painting's title parodies or embraces Abstract Expressionism's supposed emotional authenticity, but her clunky touch has a say-it-once-and-move-on attitude that has little to do with the "autographic mark" over which so much fuss was made during that period.

In the juicy, jangly upper panel of "Blue Balls," Ms. Saccoccio ventures into Frankenthaler territory, reserving compositional columns and slabs for the painting's lower level. The real fireworks are in a hot number called "Rose Grid." An entanglement of fat, overlapping strokes in sugary pink and pale blue floats above a broken band of green-streaked ultramarine. Underlying this painting is another, made of sturdier stripes in stouter hues. There is little attempt to reconcile the two, and on that fact the painting's dynamism hinges. It barely hangs together, rattled as if by some chromatic wind that threatens to blow everything away.

At Elizabeth Harris, Ms. Parlato also has a nose for pictorial essentials, though her plasticky, Pop palette and utterly transparent process connect her to a later phase of abstraction. The artist pours and pools her viscous, opaque acrylics onto her canvases to form irregular blobs of dense, unmodulated color. They recall Lynda Benglis's polychrome polyurethane pieces of the late 1960s, in a smaller and more controlled arena. Tendrils of runoff attest that the canvases were tilted this way and that before the paint dried, adding a linear, even lacy counterpoint to the bumptious bulges.

At nearly 7 feet across, "Nature Games" is the most directly worked, eschewing any ambiguity of figure and ground. Overlapping shapes in teal, avocado, lavender, indigo, and fleshy pink drift like decorator jellyfish in an ochre ocean. The viewer is put on notice that just because a particular hue might be cloying, a favorite of stylists a few decades ago, or used by manufacturers of children's galoshes, this doesn't disqualify it from serious consideration.

With such a predetermined approach, Ms. Parlato risks becoming programmatic. Thus far, however, she avoids that trap. Surprises abound, such as the hot pink pancake marooned among encroaching taupe in "Small Fracture," and the funny ears that the big greenish splat in "What

Goes Up" wears. Such moments, happy accidents, require both the finesse to bring them into being, and the alertness to recognize them when they happen. A horizontal orange bar just a few inches long anchors "Melting Time," a remnant of a chapter in the painting's history that is otherwise obscured. The thickly overlaid pigment imparts a relief element, particularly conspicuous in smaller works such as this. Both painters have been showing consistently for a decade or so. Ms. Parlato has gone a bit further in cultivating the personal peculiarities that make her work distinctive. But Ms. Saccoccio's verve and nerve are just as bracing, and her ease with the mid-20th-century tradition places her work within a resurgent "painterly painting."

*Saccoccio until February 9 (11 Rivington St., between Christie Street and the Bowery, 212-445-0444);*

*Parlato until February 2 (529 W. 20th St., between Tenth and Eleventh avenues, 212-463-9666).*