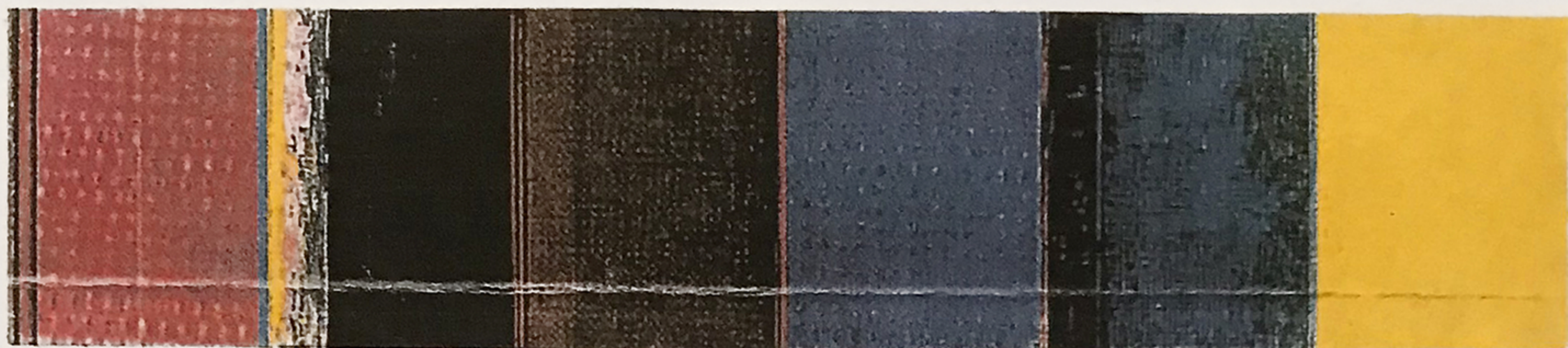


Art in America

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REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS



Nola Zirin: *Color Itinerary II*, 2003, mixed mediums on wood panel, 24 by 108½ inches; at June Kelly.

Nola Zirin at June Kelly

Color was the driving force behind Nola Zirin's eight abstract canvases made during the past two years, seen in a recent exhibition at June Kelly. Zirin juxtaposes monochrome planes of undisturbed color with agitated areas that contrast in hue and paint application. In three large vertical works, solid yellow fields—one lemony, another warm, another chalky—are flanked by wide columns of darker colors such as blues, greens and browns. These somber hues have been spread on in thick patches à la Hans Hofmann, or in Richteresque squeegees and wet-into-wet streaks.

Despite Zirin's choice of a composition suggestive of a doorway and her use of sunny hues, the yellow fields do not embrace or beckon but act as barriers, rushing toward the viewer and prohibiting entry. This odd sensation becomes more poignant after reading Linda Yablonsky's catalogue essay in which she relates these paintings to the missing Twin Towers that the artist was once able to see from her Brooklyn studio. With the altered skyline, Zirin sees light where the skyscrapers had been, and she communicates their absence through the aggressive presence of color.

Two long horizontal canvases create a wholly different mood. The color play in these is subtle and seductive. *Color Itinerary II*, at 2 by 9 feet, provides the equivalent of a meditative walk. Monochromatic rectangles—unequal areas of cool yellow, rich azure, dark periwinkle, deep crimson and luminous pinkish purple—are separated by thin intervals of dissimilar colors. The gentle modulations in the monochrome sections enhance their allure. For instance, as the eye moves from the right to the left, the green tinge of the block of azure disperses and takes on a darker tone created by a waxy black that has been scraped off. This black glaze resonates with a vertical strip of warm black further to the left, which in turn sits near a mottled band of yellow, pink and aqua. The light fuchsia plane at the left end has a sliver of yellow down its center and two carefully placed black lines at the canvas's edge. The colors interact with one another while maintaining their individuality.

Zirin included in this show a small painting titled *Through the Curtain* (24 by 36 inches) that is different than all the others. The central region of the painting contains a wide section of translucent green interrupted by a long lozenge of blue. To the right and left, a waxy black layer has been scraped away in an intricate network of boxy lines, revealing an airy green and blue underlayer.

It's interesting to see drawing (albeit lines that have been removed rather than added) gain importance in a show otherwise dominated by chromatic effects. Gazing through her studio windows, Zirin seems to find the metaphors she needs to capture her thoughts in abstract form.

—Cathy Lebowitz