

Art in America

The World's Premier Art Magazine

Carol Diehl May 2008

Now in midcareer, New York-born artist Gary Komarin makes works that owe as much to Color Field painting as to his off-cited mentor, Philip Guston. While scrawled Guston-like tropes are definitely a hallmark of Komarin's work, they are balanced by deep, thoughtful breaths in between. Enhanced by an energetic use of color, Komarin's images rely on the tension between the spontaneous and the considered, the accidental and the consciously executed, for their striking vitality. The artist hides nothing—his methods are perfectly evident as he covers and uncovers, delineates and sweeps over the shapes on his canvas. And what are these shapes? They could be things—boats, bottles, boxes and hats—or they might just as easily refer to nothing in particular. Precisely positioned on the border between image and abstraction, Komarin's forms offer what John Elderfield, speaking of Martin Puryear's sculpture, so eloquently referred to as a "familiarity that resists recognition."

All of the paintings in this exhibition were from 2006 or 2007, large-scale, often with a surface of acrylic paint on raw canvas, or house paint mixed with spackle—combinations that provide a particularly matte ground for Komarin's drips, scrawls and idiosyncratic fillips of enamel, crayon, oil pastel and other assorted mediums. Rimmed with hints of orange at the top and bottom, the black surface of *The Disappointed Mistress #12* (2007, 80 by 68 inches) is so flat that it's almost like a blackboard—but an improbably transparent one. As the eye adjusts to the dark, faint crayon lines, the ghostly layers of under- and over-painting slowly come into focus, until what originally looked like a very simple composition becomes infinitely more complex.

Other works are not so reticent, but declare themselves immediately with strident backgrounds of red, azure blue or grass green, which are in turn overlaid with big blocks of strong, contrasting color and bold, barely controlled gestures of crayon or pigment. Sometimes delicate, other times crude, these shapes are as confident as they are enigmatic. There is no narrative here, no underlying message, except for the process, with its revelations, both conscious and unconscious. Any single interpretation is by design subject to change. In many ways, what you see is what you get, except that the next time you look, what you get may be completely different.