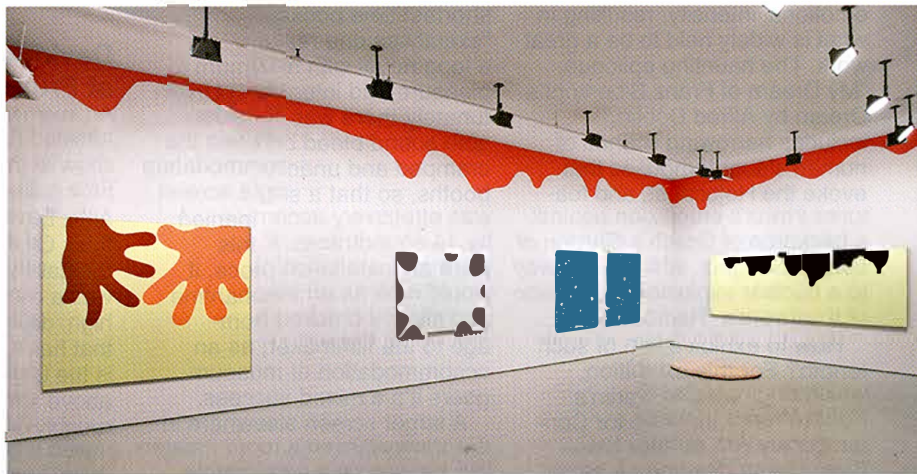


Art in America

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REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS



View of Carl Ostendarp's exhibition of paintings from 1989-2007; at Elizabeth Dee.

Carl Ostendarp at Elizabeth Dee

In the last days of the 1980s, exaggerated form began to overtake abstract painting. Steven Parrino exhibited mangled shaped canvases, Fabian Marcaccio carved stretcher bars into knotlike shapes, and Carl Ostendarp poured out thick slabs and blobs of urethane foam. Three works from that period were included in a recent mini-survey of Ostendarp's career. The 4-foot-square *Get Drunk* (1990) is thickly poured urethane mounted on stretched jute, with an irregular surface painted a cool off-white. *What's Next To the Moon* (1992) consists of a large pink pancakelike form mounted on linen; a light green-tinged ground is framed by a broad brown band. The discrete, pink blob *Anything to Please* (1992), 4½ feet in diameter, sits directly on the floor. Made during the heyday of postmodernism, at a time when painting had been declared dead, these works explore the interface between painting as object and image. They were received as a cynical though humorous commentary on the dumb, dead-end literalness of abstract art and modernism.

Gradually abandoning the use of foam, which had become his signature material, Ostendarp began to create images that self-

consciously reference "paint." In an untitled work (1991-92), a stylized silhouette looks like paint being flung across a mottled field of benday dots. Alluding to the relationship between painting and mechanical reproduction, Ostendarp addresses a theme central to Pop art. The form of *Grape Ish* (1992) is omnidirectional, as purplish fingertiplike shapes reach in from the canvas's framing edges. Here the interplay of figure and ground suggests the commonality of Pop and formalist painting, referring both to Lichtenstein's comic-book explosions and Morris Louis's "Floral" series.

Ostendarp has continued to exploit the ambiguous nature of his forms and their connection to late modernism. In *Untitled (Couple Painting—Yellow)*, 1999, a pair of splayed Muppet-like hands (one brown, the other pink) can be seen either as a reference to racial harmony or as a pair of stylized splashes of color. The sawtooth pattern of mauve bands in *Untitled (Miro painting)*, 2004, seems to signify motion and spontaneity and to resemble a graphic representation of grass or an anamorphic projection of letterforms. The wall painting *Philmore* (2007) wrapped around the upper walls of the gallery's entire front room. Resembling the drips on the side of a paint

can, its Pepto-Bismol pink undulations seemed comically to threaten the paintings hanging on the cool gray walls below.

Two works included in the show, *Virgo* and *Orion* (both 1997), are exceptions to Ostendarp's use of flat, matte color over the past 15 years. They present, instead, gestural fields of light blue overlaid with splatters of turquoise. Upon these color fields he has imposed constellations of irregularly shaped five-pointed stars of differing sizes, turning the washy grounds into a cartoonish night sky.

While his work has remained more or less stylistically consistent, Ostendarp has, over time, inflected his quirky sense of drawing and color, and his vocabulary of comic forms. Though this exhibition was a less than adequate sampling, it offered a tantalizing demonstration of how Ostendarp's sustained engagement with the principles of Color-Field painting Pop and Minimalism, combined with his idiosyncratic sensibility, have resulted in a productive synthesis of late modernist styles. Though esthetically distinct, Ostendarp's use of formalism is rhetorically comparable to Jonathan Lasker's schematic painting or David Reed's illusionistic approach to process.

—Saul Ostrow