

Art in America

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Sharon Horvath: Lori Bookstein

Stephen Maine

Inaugurating this gallery's new space in Chelsea, "Parts of a World," an exhibition of Sharon Horvath's most recent work, included 20 paintings on canvas, or on paper mounted to canvas, in dispersed pigment, ink and polymer. Their formal boldness and buoyancy link them to a strain of gregarious abstraction typified in work by Thomas Nozkowski and Chris Martin, but Horvath's cartooniness is a red herring. Deeply poignant, these works slowly unfurl a rich iconography resonating with the idea of site.

In "Your Blue Loom, for Martin Ramirez" (64 by 76 inches), 2007, a complex and fantastical scaffolding in greenish blue and a little yellow ochre hums against a pale pink ground. Named for the posthumously celebrated Ramirez, a schizophrenic self-taught artist, the painting weaves minute brush marks into a muscular circuitry populated by tiny, anthropomorphic tangles of paint. The same blue is slithery and electric against transparent reds in "About the Car" (46 by 54 inches), 2006-09, a view from the driver's seat of a schematized windshield, rearview mirror and instrument panel. At dead center on the dashboard, the AC vent glows, a greenish grin. The automobile can symbolize the alienation of modern life, but you gather Horvath likes to drive.

While those paintings revel in flatness, the artist deals differently with space in the scale-shifting "Nightbed" (70 by 76 inches), 2002-09. Irregular, undulating, finely wrought black lines enmesh regions of grassy green and fleshy pink, and are anchored by white-spangled blocks of blue-black. The homey cradle of the title can also be read as an elevated view of a baseball stadium during a night game. The frame of reference leaps from intimate to public, domestic to civic, bassinet to coliseum.

The relative concision of smaller paintings such as "The Goodbye Door (2)," (2007), is bracing: blocks of hot yellow, greenish gray, blue and orange-red vie for dominance. Though sometimes Horvath's surfaces can be overworked, her mark-making is arresting even when excessive. It is not the obsessional handwork so hip a decade ago (and now, thankfully, in recession) but a lavishing of attention, a marshaling of energies proper to the depiction of psychically charged spaces. "Afterlife" (68 by 76 inches), 2002-09, goes for broke: its subject is the grave. Billowing above a brownish patch that looks freshly dug is a steam cloud or thought bubble sprouting crazy Boschian blooms and tubers, pegging the big sleep to a field of dreams. Cloistered within a few square inches in the painting's lower right corner is a little green-and-pink baseball diamond. Sweet.