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Mario Naves review of *Tricia Wright, New Paintings*, at Metaphor Contemporary Art, September 2002.

Exquisite Puddles

When I tried to describe the abstract paintings of Tricia Wright to a friend, the best I could do was “Like Helen Frankenthaler, only sexier”. This does a disservice to both Ms. Frankenthaler (who is nothing if not a sensualist) and Ms. Wright. To call Ms. Wright’s up-dated brand of Colorfield painting “sexy” is to underplay its lurid character. Her exquisitely manipulated puddles of acrylic paint connect partly as symbol—the shapes they ultimately take can be mighty suggestive—but mostly as color and process. The influence of Pop Art on her palette is unmistakable, and yet the synthetic hues she favors are surprisingly resonant. Her painting technique is at once intimate and calculated.

Last spring, Ms. Wright all but stole a group show devoted to color in DUMBO, Brooklyn. In her first solo exhibition at the same venue, the emphasis in her art has shifted. The work is becoming less erotic and more figurative. This change isn’t uninteresting; the artist’s trailing splatters have become unabashedly decorative and recall the flourishes of Chinese and Arabic art. She still knows how to “hold” the canvas—juxtaposing abstract calligraphy against geometric partitions guarantees a pictorial snap. Yet the new work is over-intellectualized and a bit thin. It’s as if Ms. Wright felt the need to flaunt her smarts—a quality already apparent in the earlier work. The result is art with a chip on its shoulder. Luckily, there’s a suite of nine small pictures in which biomorphic shapes snuggle up against each other to droll and fetching effect. Ms. Wright had fun making these “desirable objects”—her art benefits more from material play than it does from pictorial exegesis. She’s sharp enough to recognize the distinction; lets see if she acts on it.