

Journal Santa Fe

FRIDAY
NOVEMBER 16, 2007

50 CENTS
EDITION

A ZONED PUBLICATION OF  ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

Art Walker



HOLLIS WALKER
For the Journal

The folks at LewAllen Contemporary have gotten very good at putting together small group shows that have a cohesive feel to them, shows in which the artists' works interact with each other well. This is one of those exhibits. Steven Klein's glass sculpture, Madeleine Keesing's minimal paintings and Brad Ellis' linear encaustic grids have similarities in rhythm and pattern that harmonize well.

Ellis, a Dallas artist who works in ongoing series, demonstrates an ability to take a single idea and play with it so that it is continually evolving. As recently as a year ago, his encaustic-on-panel works comprised clear horizontal stripes of strong color layered over collaged newspaper text and energetic, but just barely revealed, mark-making. His language has developed considerably. In this exhibit, he shows works that derive clearly from last year's: a red-striped vertical piece and a blue-striped vertical



piece from his "Currents" series follow the old directive. But his more recent works have advanced the idea. His mark-making is more prominently revealed, more regular in pattern, and his horizontal striping has become more subtle; it's as if he has grown more confident of his vocabulary and therefore more willing to reveal it.

In his largest and most recent work, "Currents 07-03," Ellis has left off colored stripes for pure, translucent strokes of wax, so that the collaged text and marks underneath are much more visible. His paint colors are more varied and brighter, and the work more active and musical, than in the past.

In his other series, "Elysium," he has abandoned lines and control for a drippy, splashy, heavily layered surface with large, gestural strokes that are only second cousins to the regular, short, even bursts of line in the "Currents" series. It's as if he's of two minds: that which produces "Currents" is obsessively controlled — maybe he's listening to Bach while he's working — while that which makes "Elysium" has been playing Olivier Messiaen, the French composer who, you will recall, perceived colors when he heard certain harmonies.

I liked Ellis' work when he was in his most controlled "Currents" phase (disclaimer: he was in a group show earlier this year at the gallery where I am employed), but I like his looser, newer work better. His development is



COURTESY LEWALLEN CONTEMPORARY

"Elysium #2" is a 2007 encaustic, oil and paper on canvas by Brad Ellis. Below right, Madeleine Kessing's "Shoreline" is a 10-panel grid, measuring 7½ by 6 feet. Below left, Steve Klein's subtle and elegant "Balance 75" combines kiln-formed and blown glass.

propitious pairings

LewAllen Contemporary
finds artists who complement
one another within a theme

analogous to that of the poet who must master the rules of rhyme and meter before abandoning them to create great free verse.

Madeleine Keesing's works struck me much as Bridget Riley's. Keesing makes paintings comprised of repetitive horizontal lines of drippy paint with the effect of fabric rick-rack. She layers these lines, sometimes in wildly disparate, non-complementary colors; in other works, she combines only two colors, one underneath the other.

Keesing has been working in this mode for about 30 years. Her work is more minimal than Riley's quintessential optical art, but Keesing's works create the same effect of vibrations and rhythm as do Riley's.

It is her simpler works that I prefer. "Red," a 76-inch by 60-inch painting with two layers of orangish-red over gray, evokes a knitted scarf. "Graphite," in gray layers on a red-painted canvas, glows a silvery concrete-gray that makes the red that appears faintly underneath even richer. Best of all is "Shoreline," her 10-panel grid, 91 inches by

72 inches, in alternating horizontal panes of cornflower blue on cream, and cream atop the blue. The checkerboard effect is playful, soothing and engaging.

The illusory quality of Keesing's work is intellectually appealing because it appears from a distance to be quite regular; only up close do you realize those lines are — surprise — messy, like the handwriting

of the very elderly. The irregularity is actually a relief.

Steve Klein's glass sculptural works fill out the trine. These, too, trick the eye. All are undulating square plates of glass layered with candy-stripes of color, upon which perfect blown globes have been set. Klein's color choices are all over the map, from soft pastels to the strong contrast of red and black.

"Balance 75" comprises a flat black plate, split on the diagonal with an internal layer of yellow sandwiched by a layer of stripes; on one triangle of the plate is black, on the other, white. Two open globes sit atop the plate at slight angles, leaning toward each other, suggestive of the interaction and fragility of relationships.

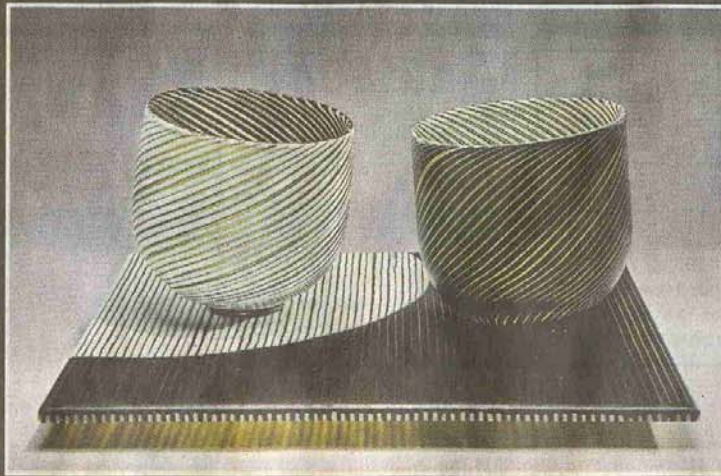
Dramatic, subtle and elegant, these works call forth the gods of physics, of

air, light and form. It would be easy to dismiss them because they are, in effect, variations on a theme, but the technical virtuosity required to create them, in the kiln and on the pipe, should be appreciated. They are the perfect sculptural complement to the Ellis and Keesing two-dimensional works.

LewAllen's owners have shifted the scope of their shows in the last few years.

They are less focused on individual artists, emphasizing instead thematic or conceptual combinations. By pairing veteran artists with lesser-known ones, they set up an interesting dialogue between past and present. In this case, at least, I think that idea has proved quite interesting.

Contact Hollis Walker at hwalker259@earthlink.net



If you go

WHAT: "Linear Variations," works by Steven Klein, Madeleine Keesing and Brad Ellis

WHEN: Through Dec. 2

WHERE: LewAllen Contemporary, 129 W. Palace Ave.

CONTACT: 988-8997, www.lewallencontemporary.com