

BRIDGETTE **MAYER** GALLERY

Art in America

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709 Walnut Street 1st Floor Philadelphia PA 19106 tel 215 413 8893 fax 215 413 2283
email bmayer@bridgettemayergallery.com www.bridgettemayergallery.com

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Charles Burwell:
Interior, Interior, 2010,
oil on canvas,
52 by 40 inches;
at Bridgette Mayer



Kathryn Refi:
President Gerald Ford Greets Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Florida, 2010, charcoal on paper, 41½ by 53½ inches; at Solomon Projects.

attributes. *Taken* presents a haircut as fairy tale. A free-floating pair of scissors snips a lock from the head of a girl whose warm brown skin stands out against the turquoise ground. In the air behind hangs a large green cabbage whose precise meaning cannot be defined.

The larger works are both more ambitious and more complete; the girls play in the surf on a beach, squat in patches of cabbages and shoes, or kneel to peer through the broken ice of a frozen pond. In *Sweet Dreams*, two girls seen from above lounge near an almost phallic three-tiered tower of cupcakes; milk has spilt from the overturned cup in one of the girl's hands. Here the subtle eroticism is unlike the knowing voyeurism of Balthus, or the aggressive sexuality of Marlene Dumas's figures; these girls are seemingly unaware of the sensuality they radiate. Trailing floral vines that intrude from the edge of the picture undermine any sense of naturalism, forcing the viewer to recognize in the work a world of symbols as well as subjects.

The intensity with which Williamson forms the small objects in the paintings further emphasizes their symbolic quality. Nothing is painted with more attention than the cupcakes and milk bottles, the cabbages and shoes, the props which are the show's leitmotifs. The girls themselves are stiff by comparison, strangely static, despite their contorted postures. Atmosphere outweighs specific meaning.

In *Garden Gift*, two girls crouch above a pile of shoes and cabbages in the foreground. Behind them a third girl, perhaps intruding on the scene, is painted with

uncharacteristic looseness. It's a glimpse of how a freer handling of the paint might have given a very different impression.

—Tadzio Koelb

PHILADELPHIA CHARLES BURWELL BRIDGETTE MAYER

In this show of nine recent paintings, "Structuring Desire/Desiring Structure," Charles Burwell offered no quiet moments. The title suggests a mind comfortable with systems of order, such as those found in math and science. But Burwell's visual world, which comprises overlapping shapes and striated hues, is brilliant and delightful. While we think of scientific investigations as somber and labored, Burwell's abstract structures, replete with optical effects, dazzle the eye, prompting viewers to check and recheck what they see. An untitled work from 2010, for example, features the interplay of blue stripes against a burnt-orange ground, with flashes of white where the colors intersect. Rather than hitting you over the head, the artist presents a fleeting gestalt, a sleight of hand.

A magician with secondary and tertiary colors, Burwell creates highly patterned surfaces involving layers and layers of paint. The second or third layer serves as background for crisply defined forms—lines, clover shapes, circles and semicircles that often converge. Yet elements such as a totemic rectangular monolith, rendered in burnt orange on a viridian field in *Distant Key* (2010), exemplify his deviation from standard design vocabulary.

Burwell, who earned an MFA at Yale in 1979, is one of a cluster of artists, including Jim Lambie and Odili Donald Odita, who combine lessons learned from Color Field, Op art and pattern painting of the 1970s. And, yes, the immediacy of Pop art is evoked as well. These artists all share a strong measure of chromophilia.

Despite his use of geometric forms and design principles, Burwell never loses the visceral intensity of gesture. Looping colored stripes and concentric circles convey movement that is simultaneously fluid and controlled. Snippets of various shapes collide as in a vortex. The key work in the exhibition, *Interior, Interior* (2010), evokes the possibility of ontological states—the varied landscapes within us—corresponding to the spatial relationships in the painting. "Structuring Desire/Desiring Structure" had an intensity of spirit that could be felt; its overriding message was the sheer joy and lyricism of painting.

—A.M. Weaver

ATLANTA KATHRYN REFI SOLOMON PROJECTS

Kathryn Refi uses her artistic practice to examine how she fits into the world. Like On Kawara, she tracks her existence via a set of predetermined parameters, creating artworks that fit within self-imposed limits. Previously she has measured her daily movements with a light meter, à la Spencer Finch, and used the data to create abstract paintings. For this new body of work, all completed in 2010, the Athens, Ga.-based artist developed three projects centered around the date of her birth.

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