

Art in America

Karin Davie at Mary Boone

By Matthew Guy Nichols | September 2005

Karin Davie has made a name for herself painting stripes. For the past several years, her distinctive bands of vibrant color have rippled across her canvases in exaggerated S-curves. But just as these dizzily warped abstractions threatened to become a redundant signature style, Davie discovered a way to move on. The eight medium-to-large paintings in her recent show may invite the label “transitional”, but only in the best sense of the word. The shift at hand seems fluid and organic, and not a contrived effort to jump a played-out stylistic groove.

Long, luscious, colorful strokes of oil paint remain the basis for Davie’s new works. One hesitates, however, to call them stripes any longer. Rather

than conform to a single voluptuous rhythm, these new brush strokes wriggle about independently. They twist, turn and weave through each other in densely layered, all-over compositions that vaguely resemble piles of snakes, noodles or intestines. The latter association is encouraged by paintings like *Between My Eye and Heart No. 18* (2005), which combines thick, looping lines of blood red, flesh pink and bruised purple to strongly visceral effect.



Between My Eye and Heart no. 1, 2004, Oil on canvas, 84”x 108”

Davie continues to work wet-on-wet, but now blends much more of her pigment with overlapping brushwork. By dragging loaded, rounded brushes through contracting colors, she often generates strong modeling that lends tubular substance to individual strokes and convincing depth to entire paintings. In *Between My Eye and Heart No. 1* (2004), for example, the topmost squiggles of violet and dark green appear to be distantly backlit by the underlying yellows and pink they wipe up. Whereas the curves of the earlier, flatter stripes seem to press against the edges of each canvas, Davie’s new technique achieves the illusion of elastic strain in three dimensions.

Given the spatial complexity of these recent paintings, it was not terribly surprising to encounter three wall-mounted sculptures in this show, some of the first such works Davie has exhibited. For these sculptures, Davie wove wide ribbons of white paper and silver Mylar into mounds 32 inches in diameter that resemble enormous gift-wrapping bows. Foot-long zippers are attached to the occasional cuts in the paper. When unzipped, they reveal the brightly painted undersides of the paper and their colorful reflections in adjacent strips of Mylar. Through her sculptures invoke the works of Lucio Fontana, Lynda Benglis and Siobhan Liddell, Davie combines these diverse references into distinctively hybrid forms. It was therefore odd to discover the sculptures squirreled away in the gallery’s small rear office. I nearly missed them, and they beg a more confident display.