

At the Galleries

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KAREN WILKIN

ONCE, BEFORE THE ART MARKET SUPERHEATED, the art world used to slow down, even halt, during the summer months. Galleries mounted group shows from their inventory and often closed completely in August. This year, some galleries took brief holidays, as if taking a deep breath before the explosion of September openings and art fairs, but most kept to a normal schedule. As a result, the past season also included some noteworthy exhibitions, dominated by abstractions (mostly) made by women.

At Prince Street Gallery, Gina Werfel inaugurated the September rush with “Bicoastal.” Werfel, who divides her time between California and New York, explores the resonance of color to evoke potent recollections of experience. She celebrates the painter’s role in transferring pigment to surface, deploying a wide vocabulary of gestures to weave loose, all-over, pulsating fabrics across the canvas, conjuring up intense sensations of light and air. While Werfel’s paintings can seem to allude to nature and to perceptions of our surroundings, in general, they are also emphatically about the act of painting. We mentally recapitulate the making of the work, as we follow a lexicon of marks ranging from fluent, cursive swirls and sweeps to crisp, brisk stabs. Most of the works on view were constructed with one kind of handwriting or the other— either sensuous and curving or clean-edged and quasi-geometric, not both in one painting—with broader, sometimes brushier zones engulfing or cancelled by the fluid or hard-edged gestures. But in *Lace* (2024), a radiant, memorable work, transfers and stenciling provided counterpoint to intimate touch, emphasizing the artist’s role in making in yet another way. Not surprisingly, given the disparate origins of the works on view in Werfel’s California and Long Island City studios, some offered suggestions of the outdoors, vegetation, even blossoms, while others seemed more associated with the man-made environment, but all clearly reflected the same sensitivity to the nuances of actuality and delight in inventing painterly equivalents for lived experience.



Gina Werfel, *Lace*, 2024. Acrylic and spray paint on canvas. 40 x 30 inches. Courtesy of Prince Street Gallery.