

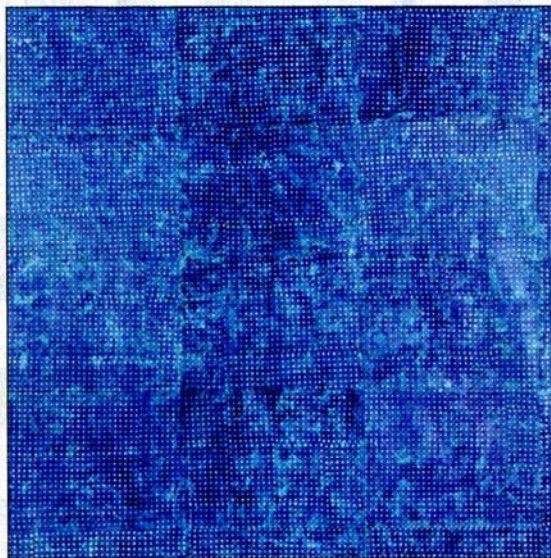


Brad Ellis arranged pebbles in an even grid pattern on "Pearl Drops 09-04," a 2009 encaustic and collage on canvas.

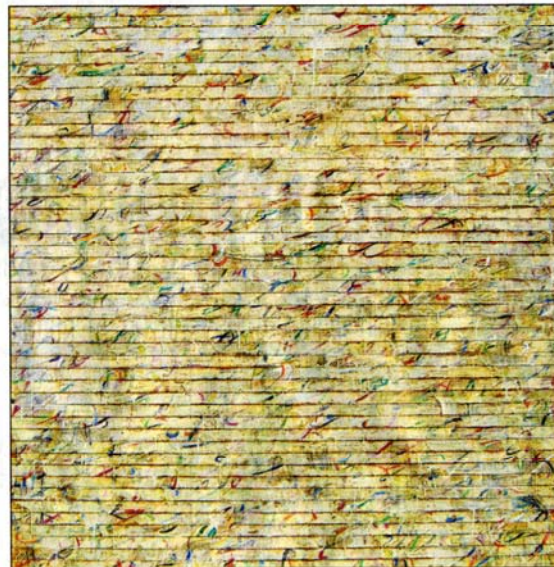


Brad Ellis generated a pattern of slashed and dripped paint on "Glory," a 2009 encaustic and collage on canvas.

RHYTHM IN LAYERS



By methodically layering materials, Brad Ellis creates a formal composition of overall pattern in works like "Pearl Drops 09-03," a 2009 encaustic and collage on canvas.



"Currents 08-20" is a 2008 encaustic, oil and collage on Senra board by Brad Ellis.

COURTESY LEWALLEN GALLERIES

Artist melds paper and encaustic to create vivid patterns

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By **KIM RUSSO**
For the Journal

Brad Ellis' paintings at LewAllen Contemporary are formal compositions of pattern, mark and process that many visitors will find addictive and attractive. An even, overall pattern is common to all of the works, as are layers of paper and encaustic. The resulting works look, in many cases, like sections of time-worn wallpaper or curtains, or squares of rocky landscape cut from the earth.

"My Funny Valentine," in homage to Chet Baker, is an exuberant polka dot painting made by layering newspaper with highly saturated ovals of encaustic. Between dots, some of the newspaper text is readable: "trade fiction," "the real Cuba," "consider another crudity."

"The Golden Road to Unlimited Devotion" looks like Victorian wallpaper torn from the walls of a water-logged house. Again, newspaper is layered with encaustic in drips and brush-strokes, all in an ochre palette.

In several works, Ellis sticks real or constructed rocks to the surface of the painting. The least

Object Lessons



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successful of these, "Fragments From Earth #19," is so suggestive of a desert landscape that it fails to be an abstract pattern and becomes frustratingly literal. In this work, Ellis abandons the strongest quality of his paintings — the fact that his paintings fully reference themselves instead of objects or spaces outside themselves. The most successful work in this series, which Ellis calls the "Pearl Drops" series, the rocks are arranged in an even grid pattern in a monochromatic, sandy palette.

In his artist's statement, Ellis states, "All of [these] paintings started with a paper collage ground that was adhered to the surface of canvas or boards.

If you go

WHO: "Brad Ellis: Pattern, Rhythm and Process"

WHERE: LewAllen Contemporary,

129 W. Palace Ave., Santa Fe

WHEN: Through April 28

CONTACT: (505) 988-8997 or www.lewallencontemporary.com

These collage elements were either acquired or created by me as I'm continuously looking for and experimenting with various paper products..." Reading Ellis' statement and looking closely at the works, it is clear that Ellis works systematically: collaged paper is arranged in a grid on top of which a pattern is created (Victorian scrolls, polka dots, a grid of circles) which is topped off by a series of marks or actions that mess up all that organization and create some energy. The thickness of the build-up and the types of marks are basically the same

from work to work. Some works are large, some medium, some small. According to gallery staff, all of the works in this show were made in a relatively short period of months during the past year.

What is Ellis up to? Is he referencing the Pattern and Decoration movement of the '70s? Is he challenging the traditional hierarchies of the contemporary art market, or suggesting that narrative and representation are faulty, or trying to raise the value of craft? Or is he referencing the late Abstract Expressionist works of Jackson Pollock, as might be suggested in "Glory," a large red canvas on which Ellis slashed and dripped paint? It's hard to tell. Pollock carefully orchestrated his drips so that each mark came up to the edge of the canvas and then turned back and inward, which kept the entire composition in constant, circulating gyration. In contrast, Ellis' drips and slashes are radically severed by the edge of the canvas. They are chunks of castigated energy, smaller samples of something larger.

There is nothing in Ellis' work or in his statement that suggests his paintings are about pushing

specific historical boundaries or speaking any new versions of truth. One could describe Ellis' bright, bold paintings as high-end decorations for art-loving clients of interior designers. The larger works, which are five feet square, are the perfect size painting for above a couch, bed or dining room table.

The only possible exception is a group of small paintings, "Red," "White" and "Blue," three monochromatic works that seem to make commentary on America. The paint that covers the newspaper seems to both reveal and conceal the information underneath. Perhaps these paintings are commentaries on the current economic crisis and the lies of Wall Street?

In the end, it's unclear. Ellis' works are definitely about having some visual fun, and we all like that, of course. These paintings are exciting to the eye. There is a kind of "ooo, ahh" that happens when one walks into the gallery and experiences the first moments of being in the room with these paintings.

Some art is just plain pretty.