

ing, dark canvas that features a central area of swirling pools of deep purple, blue and black. Layers of white and yellow near the top of the canvas suggest a celestial light. The surface of this piece, and of numerous others in the show, is characterized by a crackling effected in the drying process. The outermost paint layers pull away in certain areas to reveal the underpainting. Bearing a resemblance to Larry Poons's so-called elephant skin paintings of 1970, these encrusted surfaces are at once dense and luminous.

Celebrations: Yellow and Orange is another large, resplendent canvas that, as the title suggests, communicates

reminders of Olitski's past, they are hardly nostalgic gestures. Obviously in full command of his medium, Olitski portends in his work an optimistic future for painterly abstraction.

—David Ebony

Charles Spurrier at Feigen Contemporary

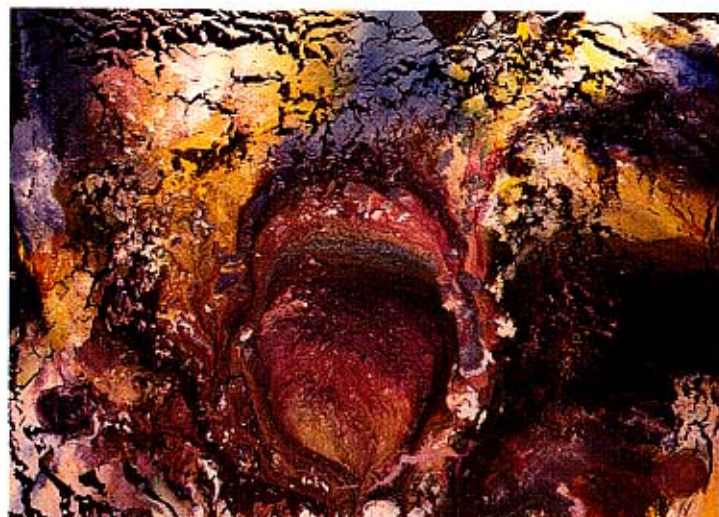
Charles Spurrier is an interesting painter who doesn't paint. Like the late great Hannah Wilke, he sometimes chews gum. In the past, he has made fields of colored globs of gum on wood panels. I like a work where you can see the artist's toothmarks or other bodily traces. Spurrier is idiosyncratic from the ground up.

In recent works, he uses transparent tape, often covered with his fingerprints, stretched not on a wood frame but on steel; 3M clear archival tape stretched on wood, I'm told, will interact with the wood and eventually deteriorate. In any case, it looks right on steel, and it opens up possibilities galore.

The best piece in this show was *Pig Vision*. Photos of jewelry from estate catalogues are lodged or "collaged" in different layers of the transparent ground. The result glitters lusciously. But in the centers of certain necklaces and bracelets, Spurrier burns holes through the background tape. Some of these holes are mended with additional tape.

Others invite the viewer to reach through the "painting" and touch the white wall behind. A wedding ring has been transformed, so to speak, into a burning bride. The painting could hang appropriately in the chambers of a divorce court judge.

A similar piece is *Everything*. Once more, estate jewelry is lodged in the transparent ground. Here, however, the method is addition, not subtraction-by-fire: a curtain of beads, extending from the top stretcher to the bottom, veils it all. The beads are cheap and a little silly, as if the artist were saying, with a smile, here it all is—and it



Jules Olitski: *Last Judgment*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 60 by 84 inches; at Ameringer Howard.

certainly does suck, doesn't it?

But Spurrier's irony sometimes becomes a little too easy. *Imitation of Prayer* is particularly irritating, his weakest piece. Christmas tree-shaped cardboard air fresheners are hung in a grid in front of a ground constructed of the same image, but in gold and silver mylar affixed to the tape.

His work is a paradox. By using cheap materials in a labor-intensive manner, Spurrier can usually transform them into art. But when he fails, the materials retain their inevitable humiliated cultural identity—cheap or ugly or inane. He always uses color imaginatively, and his flat elements are meticulously disposed; he seems to go most wrong in this show when he veers heavily into sculpture. His baubles, bangles and beads sometimes overwhelm the "paintings" they veil.

Spurrier heroically rejects traditional materials. Art has never

been mere paint and canvas but always involved forms handled with insight. —Michael Andre

Caio Fonseca at Paul Kasmin

Since his emergence on the New York art scene in 1992, after an extended romp around Europe (which included an apprenticeship in Barcelona with Uruguayan painter Augusto Torres), Caio Fonseca has been making large abstract compositions with a Mediterranean coloristic sensibility. This recent show featured eight of his by-now signature compositions. Each of the six acrylic-on-canvas pictures on view contained differently colored, flat, curvilinear shapes, often linked by calligraphic zigzag lines, in a solid field of color. The nonrepresentational shapes that float about Fonseca's compositions are derived from a recurring lexicon

Caio Fonseca: *Pietrasanta Painting C99.33*, 1999, acrylic on canvas, 50 1/2 by 72 1/2 inches; at Paul Kasmin.



Charles Spurrier: *Everything*, 2000, tape, beads, tinsel, paper, Plexiglas, steel, 48 inches square; at Feigen Contemporary.

the exuberance of the act of painting itself. Here, a central area of yellow, streaked with red and green, is punctuated on the top and far left by circular patches of silvery grit, a sandlike polymer. Running along the edges of the composition are long, thin, dexterously painted dark lines. Characteristic of many of the artist's paintings from the '60s and '70s, these slashing borders were much lauded by critics of that period as witty formalist devices to contain the infinite space of the picture plane. While the eloquent flourishes along the edges of several recent paintings are

con of geometric, biomorphic and linear forms.

In *C99.42* (1999), blue, red and yellow curves, loops and squiggles spring from and dance about on a pale yellow ground. In *5th Street #10, C00.10* (2000), a title indicating that it was made in New York City (versus Pietrasanta, Italy,

(1999), blue, red and yellow shapes drift atop a pale yellow ground, united via thin stitch lines. As with the paintings, the surfaces of these gouache-on-paper drawings were highly textured, almost gritty.

Fonseca's pictures are at once whimsical and orderly, playful and restrained. The artist himself insists that his paintings are visual extemporizations of Baroque music. Kandinsky explored the relationship between music and abstract painting in his early improvisations, as did Mondrian, whose *Broadway Boogie Woogie* combines the rhythms of jazz with geometric abstraction. If Fonseca's compositions lack the formal vigor of these earlier masters, verging at times on the decorative, they present a lively, animated extension of modernist tradition in their solid, painterly strengths. —Maura Reilly

Xenobia Bailey at Stefan Stux

Every weekend during the run of this exhibition, Xenobia Bailey could be found seated at a table in the center of the gallery. Her hands were constantly busy crocheting colorful yarn into expansive abstract wall hangings that resembled the layers of handmade garments she wore. Those who lingered to watch the working of this grandmotherly craft were soon engaged in conversation with the artist, learning that she has long been knitting a new philosophy from such strands as Afrocentricism, feminism, Native American spirituality and that great unifier of disparate cultures, funk, as practiced by her spiritual guru, George Clinton of the pioneering fusion funk and hip-hop band Parliament/Funkadelic.

"Paradise Under Reconstruction in the Aesthetic of Funk—Phase II" was a new installment in Bailey's elaborate cosmography in progress. "Phase I," which appeared last year at the Studio Museum, put viewers on notice that in her art, power is activated through visual splendor. *She Bop—She Boom* is typical of

most of the work on view. Evoking the legacy of be-bop with the title, this group of multi-color crochet circles pinned to the wall is overlaid with a lone blue figure that spirals from the center. Gradually, the viewer realizes that this being is spreading its wings. The figure consumes a yam, a food with a deep history in Africa and the American South.

The visual impact of Bailey's art is somewhat lessened when she moves toward representation, more so in the wall piece *Sistah Paradise and the Egungun*. *Sistah Paradise* is a standing figure made of yarn, wearing a pink top and emerging from a ruglike crocheted circle consisting of yellow, orange and red rings separated by black lines. Concentric yellow and blue circles represent her face, and loose orangish yarn hangs in place of arms. By invoking Egungun, the Yoruba deity of the dead, Bailey suggests that ritual inspires the repetitious process of her craft. But the results seem too literal in contrast with her more abstract work.

She finds her mark with *Sistah Paradise Great Wall of Fire Revival Tent*, described as a "Mandala Cosmic tapestry of energy flow." A gallery room was dominated by a freestanding crocheted tent—cylindrical, with a conical top—resembling an enlarged mask. With its almond eyes, dangling flaps and top-heavy form, it recalls the full-body masks of the Bamileke and Dogon peoples. Whatever the specific source, Bailey syn-

cretizes the deities, recasting the mask as a Southern Baptist revival tent. Among artists in New York, Bailey might easily be misconstrued as an eccentric obsessively involved with a folksy craft. But in the broader community of artists concerned with African traditions in the lands of the diaspora, she is among the visionaries.

—Grady T. Turner

William Edmondson at the Museum of American Folk Art

"The Art of William Edmondson" is the first major museum survey of the sculptor's work since his landmark 1937 show at the Museum of Modern Art. That well-received exhibition was remarkable not only because it was the first solo show by an African-American artist presented at MOMA, but because the works were by a self-taught outsider. Born in 1874 to freed slaves in Nashville, Edmondson, a disabled former janitor, began carving highly stylized limestone figures, animals and tombstones in 1931, after receiving what he described as a call from God. Most of the works, small or medium-size pieces rarely more than 3 feet in any dimension, are rough-hewn rounded shapes whose gritty surfaces have a dappled look.

Edmondson's workshop and sculpture garden outside Nashville were discovered by chance by the well-known photographer Louise Dahl-Wolfe, who brought the work to the attention of MOMA director

Xenobia Bailey: *Sistah Paradise Great Wall of Fire Revival Tent*, 1999, hand crochet, cotton and acrylic yarns, 10 feet high; at Stefan Stux.

where his other studio is located), Fonseca reduced his palette to burgundy and cream, the result being a more somber composition. In *5th Street #11, C00.11* (2000), the most minimalistic work on display, black intersecting shapes swim across a creamy white field. *Pietrasanta Painting, C99.33* (1999) was the most elegant and playful of the lot. A bright red undulating form dominates the bottom half of the canvas; above it hovers an orange "cloud," while smaller free-floating orange, yellow, blue and green curvilinear shapes spiral downward like rain. The two drawings in the exhibition were extraordinary as well. In *P99.3*

Photograph of William Edmondson's yard taken by Edward Weston in 1941; at the Museum of American Folk Art.

