



"Viscera on Blue and Yellow Checks" by Rini Price

## Cooling Off

### Circles, Stripes and Checks at Galerie E

Steven Robert Allen

Throughout the late '60s and '70s, Rini Price regularly exhibited her art. In 1979, however, she underwent a difficult operation for cancer, an experience that dramatically changed her attitude toward her work. Although her cancer hasn't recurred since 1984, Price has rarely exhibited over the last two decades, content to create her art outside the public eye.

Thankfully, a new one-woman show of Price's work recently opened at the microscopic Galerie E, contained upstairs inside Nob Hill's Mariposa Gallery, located on the corner of Central and Amherst. *Circles, Stripes and Checks* contains more than a dozen small-scale two-dimensional works, giving viewers a rare opportunity to view some of Price's artistic output from the last 20 years or so. A visit will make you wonder why she didn't come out of the closet sooner.

One of her major motifs is a stylized checkered pattern that expands and shrinks like the pattern on a flag rippling in the breeze. "Cooling," an acrylic on canvas piece created earlier this year, makes use of a palette ranging from dull gray-brown to shimmering blue-green, giving the pleasing impression of a surface temperature on the canvas in a state of flux.

Similar acrylic on canvas works, such as "Red Checks" (2004) and "Faux, Black and White" (2003), reflect Price's exploration of the checkered motif in a less dynamic but equally pleasing manner. In all three of these paintings,

the visible, textured surface of the canvas itself plays a vital role, the miniature, rigid grid of the canvas providing a subtle complement to the larger flowing grid of the paint.

"Collapsing (With Threads)," also created earlier this year, adopts this motif in an altered form using India ink and graphite on paper. Here, the less textured surface has a smoother, more polished effect that also goes much further in highlighting the embroidered textile aesthetic of this group of pieces.

Much of the remaining work in the show contains figurative elements. An intriguing pair of dimly hued pencil drawings—"Interesting Seas" (2000) and "Bits of Black" (1999)—

seems to depict alien surgical instruments resting on black velvet trays. Another colored pencil drawing, "Viscera on Blue and Yellow Checks," incorporates pale biomorphic shapes, the "guts" of the title, floating against a familiar blue and yellow fluttering checkerboard.

The most overtly figurative images in the show are also, in my mind, the least interesting. "Sometimes a Misstep" from 1992 depicts three dancers tangled—and in one case shish-kebabbed—on strands of rope. The largest piece in the show, "Heads of State, State of Heads" (2003), portrays four bald heads with facial features composed of chaotic squiggles posing against a red, vertically striped background.

It's Price's reconfigurations of graphic patterns that provide the show's main draw. In an accompanying statement, she writes that certain abstract themes "show up periodically (in my work) out of some personal necessity ... when I really need relief from human realities." She also writes that she's adhered to abstract themes in recent years because "at the moment, I am rather discouraged with my species."

Most of the work here has no political message, no social theme, no connection, really, with either our daily lives or global affairs. In a way, this is Price's greatest artistic asset. Although it wouldn't quite be fair to label her nonfigurative art escapist, the best pieces in *Circles, Stripes and Checks* present pleasing, strangely natural forms that do offer some inexplicable solace from the difficulties of our cruel world. ●



"Collapsing (With Threads)" by Rini Price

*Circles, Stripes and Checks*, an exhibit featuring work by Rini Price, runs through Aug. 9 at Galerie E (located upstairs inside Mariposa Gallery). 268-6828.

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