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**STEPHEN MAINE**  
**on Rosemarie Fiore**  
**at Priska C. Juschka**



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To hell with the back story... "Pyrotechnics," Rosemarie Fiore's show of new Firework Drawings is flat-out fabulous. The exhibition, on view through May 16, includes seven mostly large-scale compositions in which color and drawing, surface and space are in dynamic equilibrium. Overlapping disks of saturated blues, magentas, greens and reds vie with broad expanses in which layers of drifting chroma combine and settle into rich, beautiful hues: earth green, rust, amber, eggplant. The enigmatic spaces are shot through with vibrant bands punctuated by ghostly circles, booming and zooming across the picture plane. Each brawny surface is a welter of pigment, collage, acrylic medium, and... soot.

Oh all right, the back story: the artist's material of choice is live fireworks, or rather the tinted smoke, made of fine particles of organic dyes, that color their familiar, ordinarily airborne explosions. Fiore ignites her ordnance directly on large sheets of heavyweight Fabriano Murillo paper. She often covers the burning substance under a can or other container, which yields those circles of color. She might move the can along as the firework fumes, forming the recurring, the disk-studded bands; a mark resembling a line of spray paint comes from dragging a sparkler across the paper on the end of a stick. But the drawings' bombastic flair does not depend on the novelty of the materials, but of the artist's command of their effects.

In tandem with other projects, the artist has been developing this witty body of work for the last eight years. These latest, her grandest yet, gently echo (rather than refer to) the arcing flares, floral bursts, and showering embers of an actual fireworks display. But it's no gimmick, as Fiore's central interest here is the rather conventional interchange of figure and ground in order to complicate pictorial space. The pictorial scale of them is ambiguous, so they evoke just as readily teeming microscopic activity seen under magnification, or astronomical phenomena.

With its eyeball-like leitmotif of concentric circles racing outward along those stuttering bands against a background that mimicks tie-dye, the seven-foot-wide Firework Drawing #7 (all works 2009) gets a bit trippy. It's not just big, it's brawny: scorch marks are particularly evident here, as is incidental mark-making derived from discarded matches and spent fuses. (As to the archival stability of these dyes, Fiore figures that the UV-filtering medium she uses, as well as the UV plexiglas under which the drawings are framed, provides ample protection.)

Another favorite is Firework Drawing #10, roughly seven by five-and-a-half feet, in which collaged clusters of pale disks allude to many-petaled flowers, models of chemical compounds, and a bubble bath. Like an interloper on the scene, a big blue orb streaked with purple and magenta creeps in from the right side of the picture. Even the smallest work, the four-foot-wide Firework Drawing #26, has a commanding presence. Ochre and copper-colored bands rattle and bounce among charred craters against a plum-colored field: a cosmic pinball machine. It would be a stunner even without the knowledge of its high-decibel origins.

Fiore typically produces work out of actions. She often uses retooled machines, having made paintings and drawings with the aid of a modified floor polisher, a windshield wiper, a lawnmower, and—most spectacularly—a Scrambler, a many-armed amusement park ride which yielded enormous, Spirograph-like works on expanses of white vinyl. In these projects, which Fiore conceives of as performances and which are duly documented in photos and videos, she extends the lineage of the painting-machine, those devices designed (or appropriated) to produce a mediated or inhuman mark and leave behind artifacts of its operation. Jean Tinguely's Méta-Matic contraptions from the late 1950s and early 60s are precursors, as are some of the artists associated with the Japanese Gutai group, as well as Rebecca Horn's painting machines, among others.

As Priya Bhatnagar noted in an essay for "Painting, Performance, Machines," a 2008 exhibition overview of Fiore's work from the last decade at the Second Street Gallery in Charlottesville, VA, Fiore's work is subtly and surprisingly tied to the landscape tradition. The artist sets aside her machines in the Firework Drawings performances, but the persistence of this landscape connection emerges more strongly than ever. In the accompanying photodocumentation, Fiore is seen in her Bronx back yard, masked and hovering over her horizontal work-in-progress amid clouds of yellowish smoke, a battery of cans and buckets at the ready. She's a cross between Jackson Pollock becoming "nearer, more a part of the painting" on his Long Island lawn, and Vulcan at his fiery forge beneath Mount Etna. Not yet 40, Fiore will no doubt be shooting sparks for a long while to come, and the results will be worth watching.