

## Lydia Dona at Michael Steinberg

Garish color, awkward composition and unpleasant surfaces have for some years been among the distinguishing characteristics—and perverse attractions—of the paintings of Lydia Dona, whose latest solo show, organized by independent curator Jill Brienza and titled “New York Confidential,” inaugurated this gallery’s new quarters. Famously a disciple of poststructuralist theory, the artist considers herself a conceptualist whose needs are best met by the medium of painting, and her willful indifference to accustomed standards of harmony and coherence is bracing. Her morphology shows signs of mellowing; her paintings’ signifying elements now float in an expansive, enveloping space having more in common with full-tilt Abstract Expressionism than with her previous, more diagrammatic paintings.

The various components are smoothly synthesized in *The Girl With the Cat on Her Head*, one of a group of five 84-by-64-inch works dominating the front room

interrupting the picture and also anchoring it. Bunched around the periphery of the canvas are areas of dripped, stippled and runny enamel sign paint in industrial yellows, blues, pink and black, so dense and flat that they pull forward the space they occupy, leaving the central area of the crowded canvas feeling roomy in comparison.

In *Heat, Temperature, Light and Air* (60 by 66 inches), the overlaid drawings, in pale blue and white, alizarin, and black, drift across a richly stained field limited by framing bands. The right third of the canvas, and a strip along its bottom, are blanketed in enamel, the brushy shapes and meandering lines freely invented but locking together like a jigsaw puzzle. Wiping, which dominates *Narratives in Situ* (84 by 64 inches), veils the machine drawings as if in steam or snow; *In The Nerves of Urban Glow* (60 by 66 inches) features enamel marginalia so aggressively attended to that they threaten to overshadow the relatively restrained chroma of this painting’s central diagrammatic section, where pale but punchy



Beatriz Milhazes: *Mariposa*, 2004, acrylic on canvas, at James Cohan.

aqua-blue tracery hums against a peach ground.

The show’s title suggests (and the gallery’s literature makes explicit) Dona’s interest in film noir. A classic noir theme is the accustomed social order cut adrift, the protagonist left to fend for himself in a shifting landscape of tenuous and provisional loyalties. This group of paintings, produced in the artist’s Lower Manhattan studio a few blocks from Ground Zero, conveys a similar sense of anxiety, instability and yearning for solid ground.

—Stephen Maine

Lydia Dona: *Heat, Temperature, Light and Air*, 2003, oil, acrylic and sign paint on canvas, 60 by 66 inches; at Michael Steinberg.



## Beatriz Milhazes at James Cohan

When Clement Greenberg dismissed decoration as “the specter that haunts modernist painting,” he tacitly acknowledged its formal resemblance to the nonobjective canvases he championed. Indeed, Greenberg’s psychically freighted language posited decoration as the id to modernism’s ego, always lurking in abstraction’s shadow and threatening to assert itself. The work of Beatriz Milhazes consistently invokes this tension, and her latest show of five paintings and two collages was another welcome return of decoration’s repressed esthetic.

The grounds of Milhazes’s newest paintings (all works 2004) are subdivided into colorful