

KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

Farther downtown, at Allegra LaViola Gallery, the Whitman-derived title of Sandi Slone's exhibition of recent paintings, "Quick Mettle Rich Blood"—a reference attached to the works after the fact, not a generating motivation—signaled the painter's preoccupation with visual metaphors for everything from personal emotion to the state of our troubled planet. Slone is a master of her medium, able to make paint explode, run, spatter, pool, interpenetrate, dissolve into transparency, and more, as if she were able to transmit feeling directly into the physical stuff of painting. Like a choreographer of paint, she seems to charge each of the various gestures required for a particular kind of application with the emotion that generated it, "freezing" conviction onto the surface of the canvas. Waterfalls of pale color against infinite seas of unstable hues competed with upwellings and bursts of fragile rivulets. Combined with what the exhibition's press release accurately called "fierce color," this impressive material vocabulary turned the recent works into a theater of passions of all kinds.

Yet despite the aura of unbridled energy and strong opinions generated by Slone's recent works, the dominant quality of all the pictures in "Quick Mettle Rich Blood" was delicacy. She has long had a predilection for intimate gestures and small incidents. Even though she has often worked with oversized tools—an early series of abstractions made with push brooms established her reputation as a young painter—there has always been a sense of the hand, of cursive gestures that evoke calligraphy as much as they do the full-body sweeps of Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting. The superheated palette of many of the exhibition's paintings seemed to reinforce the allusion to Whitman (which, I hasten to point out, is not the same as illustrating, however apt the reference may seem), further contradicting the filigree of fine-scaled painting events, the exceptionally diverse pours, trickles, and sprays, whose varying intensity and multivalent directions gave the pictures their diverse moods and abundant energy. Yet that sense of delicacy prevailed, Whitman reference or no Whitman reference in the title. "Do I contradict myself? / Very well, then, I contradict myself."