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Arts

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"Sarah Cain: I Believe We Are Believers."

Sarah Cain paints light. But instead of rendering the effects of light falling on objects — a traditional subject for painters — she dissects the spectrum. In a series of large-scale paintings on paper, the artist (a 2006 SECA award winner) uses a battery of techniques to explore, and reveal to us, the rainbow that makes up white light. In her work, "color" is ribbon and tile and leaves, not just pigment. Her paint — latex, acrylic, gouache, watercolor, Sumi ink — is sprayed, dripped, splashed, and painstakingly applied. It's both reflective and matte, transparent and opaque. Her art-supply store is the dime store. Cain organizes her paintings off-center, zooms in and elaborates a passage, then pulls back and renders broad swaths. She plots points, then establishes relationships between the points on the surfaces of her paintings — as well as between her canvases and points around the room. In these pieces there is a compelling tension between the accidental and the intentional, between areas of loose handling (sprayed lines) and areas of tightness (ruled lines), between small details and large, open, white fields. Cain isn't afraid to make "ugly" work that dances to no one's tune but her own. Because she applies small bells, ribbons, mirrored fringe, and glass beads to her surfaces, her pieces also sing. Richard Tuttle (a favorite of the artist) is visible as an influence — both in terms of his legendary attention to the relationship of forms and his choice of throw-away materials. Through Oct. 20 at Anthony Meier Fine Arts, 1969 California (at Octavia), S.F. Admission is free; call 351-1400 or visit www.anthonymeierfinearts.com. (Lea Feinstein) Reviewed Sept. 27.