



The Gallery as Swatch Card

By **DAVID COHEN** | January 5, 2006

KATE SHEPHERD'S ART AND IDEAS ARE "SMART" IN BOTH THE British and American senses of the word, in equal measure elegant and savvy. "Spectrum," the group show she has curated at her dealer's, Galerie Lelong, takes its cue from a simple idea. Selecting monochromatic pieces by 20 artists, herself included, Ms. Shepherd has installed this show in a strictly color-coded spectral progression. The results are visually sumptuous and intellectually suggestive.

At first glance, the sleek, minimal galleries look like a giant swatch card from a decorator's store: white cube meets Janovic Plaza. But soon the eye adjusts to the fact that the pulsating blobs of chroma are significant examples from serious artists, an array that crosses boundaries of generation, style, and intention. Rather than trivializing the art, this singular reduction bizarrely liberates each piece to work on its own terms.

"Spectrum" is as much a riff on Minimalism as a vindication of its principles. While many of the artists are abstractionists with close ties to Minimal art, Ms. Shepherd prefers mavericks to hardliners: for example, the proto-Minimalist Ellsworth Kelly and the Californian sculptor John McCracken. For these artists, paring down to a single color is not a denial of other colors so much as an avowal of the chosen hue. Apart from a corner of steel objects by Richard Tuttle, Josiah McElheny, and Rachel Foulton, as well as Richard Hamilton's limited-edition Beatles "White Album" (1968), the elected colors of these artists are rich, strong, and distinctive.

Avoiding the po-faced grays and primaries made ubiquitous by Minimal art, these 20 uses of monochrome tend to favor colors of passion or humor, ranging from the chirpy to the luxurious. The reds and purples of mystic monochromist Frederic Matys Thursz, for instance, tend to the regal if not the papal in their luxuriant saturation. There are pieces by him in two rooms, suggesting that his richly achieved complex hues make perfect color coordinators.

Ms. Shepherd herself represents an odd fusion of Modernism and tradition: Trained at the unabashedly beaux-arts New York Academy, she fuses a virtuoso classicism with an awareness of Minimal abstraction. At first it seems her multi-paneled "Silverbud" (2005) is about pared-down form and fields of pure color, and the viewer is immediately made aware of its carpentry. But the minimalism soon gives way to sumptuous, subjective, suggestive territory. Her geometry, whether the actual structure of her support or the depicted grids and

receding planes in her imagery, plays on optical illusion and derives from such observed phenomena as parquet flooring and architecture. Glossy surface and elegant support are also violations of Minimalism's monastic vows, even if the same virtues abound in Mr. McCracken's "Light" (2002), a piece in resin, fiberglass, and plywood.

A floor piece by the late Felix Gonzalez-Torres takes up the themes of gloss and allure in a further dig at Modernist high seriousness. "Untitled (LA)" (1991) is an arrangement of 250 pounds of clear-wrapped minty-blue candy - looking distinctly turquoise in the gallery light - arranged in a severe rectangle. Color Field abstraction, it seems to be saying, can be sweet and tempting. A similar ironic bond of detritus from modern life and High Modernist aesthetics comes across in Tony Feher's "Ultra Fuchsia" (2005), where a heap of paper from a shredding machine offers exquisitely shrill eye candy.

Ms. Shepherd includes examples of gorgeously crafted work from very different traditions that seem to vindicate her own tastes and strategies. These vary from Helio Oiticica's "Spatial Relief Vermelho 10" (1959), a work that was remade in 2002 - which accounts for the fresh vibrancy of its vermilion and the vintage idealism of its constructivist streamlining - to the seamlessly glossy neo-conceptual carpentry props of Francis Cape, including his "Wainscote VI" (2003). A triptych of three paper works from different years (1961-77) by Yves Klein (recently the subject of historic shows at uptown galleries Michael Werner and L&M) with gold replacing white in this tricolore suggests a spiritual impulse behind the focus on singular colors. In Ms. Shepherd's spectrum republic, monochrome is a great democratizer.

The show also includes figurative and conceptual works that are enlisted for their monochrome without being violated by so formalist a reading. Attention focuses on the specific color of objects where color might otherwise have been neutral, and thus transparent, but other meanings and values are left intact. This is the case with Karin Sander's scaled-down 3-D body-scan self-portrait; the hospital green of the pigmented plaster is sandwiched by closely hued works of markedly different sensibility by Mr. Kelly and John Beech, whose "Coated Drawing #44" consists of a black-and-white photograph on aluminum mostly painted out in enamel. The bizarre placement of Ms. Sander's piece only serves to accentuate its enigmatic power, poised as it is between the poignant and the banal.

Until January 28 (528 W. 26th Street, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, 212-315-0470).