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Immersed in the Hubbub

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By Peter Plagens



'Turn Turn Step Step' by Keltie Ferris

Keltie Ferris

Mitchell-Innes & Nash

534 W. 26th St., (212) 744-7400

Through Jan. 12

One of the more difficult tasks for younger artists is to make abstract painting genuinely new—that is, sincerely and intelligently felt instead of performed (as with too much geometric work) or blurted out (as with too much AbEx-redux brushwork) like a rant in a family argument. Keltie Ferris, a 35-year-old painter born in Kentucky, educated at Yale's art school and now living in Brooklyn, has followed a not uncommon path. Uncommonly, she's managed to come up with something fairly fresh.

On canvases of up to 100 inches on a side (cavil: a smaller scale wouldn't hurt), she mixes ragged squares of blade-applied bright colors, sprayed-on fields and hazy dots, and a potpourri (including metallics) of a whole lot in between. The results are ingeniously clever compositions that appear, as per a prevalent fashion in current painting, to be a compositional. (Allusions to a computer screen gone haywire have gotten her labeled as a "post-digital" painter.) Still, Ms. Ferris has arrived at a style that—instead of merely serving as an entry pass to the art scene—is an affirmation of painting as a noble end in itself.