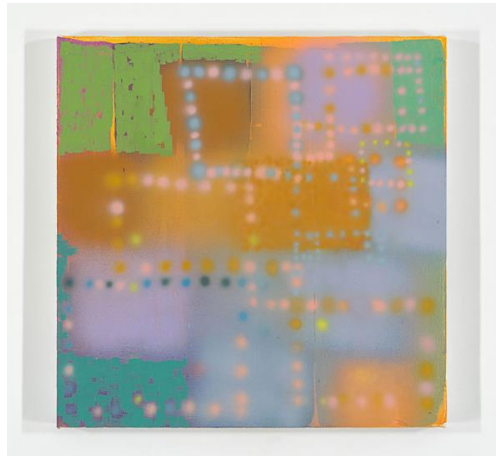


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Body Consciousness: New Paintings and Prints by Keltie Ferris

By Scott Indrisek

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Keltie Ferris' "[P]y[X]i[S]" 2015, currently on view at Mitchell-Innes & Nash.
(Courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash)

“There's a weird culture where works on paper aren't respected the same way as paintings are,” said Keltie Ferris, walking through her latest exhibition at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, which pairs vibrant mixed-media canvases with more intimate body-prints. “This show is about whether these two bodies of work, which were feeling disparate, can hang together. They have different emotional tenors, but there's a lot of conceptual overlap.” Those connections might not be readily apparent to a casual viewer. Ferris's paintings—which mix acrylic layers with oil paint applied by brush or spray-gun—are seductively loud, and seem almost wholly abstract. Yet the artist has always thought of them as expressing bodily gestures, albeit through large, hazy geometries. “I'm not saying that they are *figures*,” Ferris clarified. “But it's movement and shapes based on what bodies can do.”

As a result, it wasn't much of a leap for the artist to start experimenting with her own body, physically imprinting its form on paper. The body-prints on view in this exhibition have evolved from earlier sets, like those previously shown at Chapter NY, which were mostly monochromatic and made using graphite pigments. The works at Mitchell-Innes & Nash are as colorful as her paintings, and combine traces of Ferris's body and face with patterns and lines most often applied first to the blank paper. While she cites a few forebearers who all treated the body-print form slightly differently—from Yves Klein to Jasper Johns and Ana Mendieta—Ferris traces her particular technical process to David Hammons. It's not an easy procedure. Ferris, wearing her workaday studio outfit (“a button-down shirt and some nasty, paint-covered pants”) douses herself completely in vegetable oil. She then has to contort her body atop the paper in an attempt to put as much of its surface area in contact with it as possible. That awkward act, she said, recalls

“a complicated push-up” or the Cobra pose in yoga. “It’s actually really hard to get your shins and feet on paper,” she’s found. “You learn a lot about how rigid and uncurvy your body is.” Once the physical part of the process is completed, various pigments are applied over the paper; they settle in varying degrees depending on where they encounter oil, conjuring the resulting image.

Often, the act of pressing body to paper lends a certain cocked-hip tilt to the imprinted torso—“it comes out Elvis-y,” Ferris noted, which was the genesis for one print in this show that consciously mimics Warhol’s classic “Triple Elvis.” Other works are more abstract. One, she joked, is a “spiral of crotch-shots,” a sort of pinwheel pattern made by applying only her denim-clad lower body onto the paper. While these body-prints are made in a fairly rudimentary manner—Ferris likens it to the adolescent urge to sit on a Xerox machine—the end results are masterfully poised.

The accompanying paintings in this show are also a move forward for Ferris. What’s remained a constant is her explosive harnessing of color, a knack for wielding the “intensity of primaries.” Ferris has long had a creative flair for gesso—leaving certain shaped segments of her canvases raw, which alters the behavior of whatever pigment is applied—but she’s now taken to a more orderly version of this process. The foundation of each of these paintings is a stack of rectangular bars, some gessoed, some not. “Maybe I like horizontal lines because I’m more interested in landscape than I was before,” she surmised. “I used to be really interested in my paintings coming *out* at you, and now I’m more interested in you being able to come *into* them; having them be less obnoxiously assertive, letting them be a world you can enter. It’s more openly about bodies, in space.”