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ATLANTA

Joanne Mattera at Marcia Wood

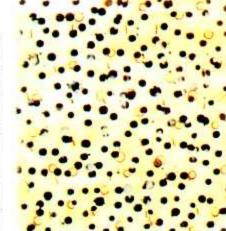
Joanne Mattera, who began showing in 1974, describes her recent encaustics on panel as "deconstructions" of the grid—the form which structured her earlier compositions. But that term seems misleadingly theoretical for works that, while often retaining the grid's organizing principle, are thoroughly grounded in the seductive surface possibilities of layers of pigmented wax.

These pictures display formal rigor exquisitely combined with the imprecision inherent in Mattera's medium. The marks are generally kept loose but are positioned carefully. Thus two paintings in the "Soros" series bring together red-dot grids with scuffed or scratched patches on a gray surface superimposed on a single underlying color-blue in Soros 4, red in Soros 5. By contrast, Soros 6 unites crudely drawn circles, a roughly sketched grid of crossing lines and repeated vertical marks on a mostly white ground.

Mattera also produces triptychs that are less dependent on the grid, though here, too, rhythms of mark-making are likely to resolve themselves into roughly perpendicular arrangements, as in the lines of Xs in

Together Again. In some works, the artist manipulates her surfaces to achieve wondrous effects of depth. In Ritmo 3 and Ritmo 16, for example, two patterns of dripped dots are laid one over the other, separated by a semitransparent layer of solid color. Though dots of white on a black ground inevitably suggest star clusters in space, the use of that motif in Ritmo 16 (which also has a counter-pattern of blue dots) is ultimately as nonreferential as Ritmo 3's black dots on white (punctuated by small red circles).

In general, Mattera uses the cloudy effects attainable with encaustic to disguise the logic of her enterprise. Despite the complex formal relations present in these works, the overall tone is intuitive rather than cerebral, and defines Mattera as a particularly adept representative of poetic intelligence. —Jerry Cullum



Joanne Mattera: Ritmo 16, 1996, encaustic on panel, 12 inches square; at Marcia Wood.

NEW ORLEANS

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