

ARTFORUM

DAVE HICKEY

By Dave Hickey

1 **Ellsworth Kelly** (*Guggenheim Museum, New York*): An interesting moment: Ellsworth Kelly and Jasper Johns passing like ships in the night. Kelly's French-kissed Hudson River-Pop never looked more relevant or more refined than in this splendid retrospective—especially in Frank Lloyd Wright's rotunda, where Kelly's sense of geometric nuance effortlessly recruits the willful perversity of the architecture to its own subtle purpose. The space will never look better. So why take it down?

2 **“Spot Making Sense”** (*Grand Arts, Kansas City*): A bright show in a sleek space with no angst and very little reading. Curators David Pagel and Sean Kelley have assembled a deft selection of works from the Bart and Lisa Generation of West Coast artists—mostly paintings, but one video and some objects, too—mostly abstract, but abstraction at its most worldly, sans process and solemnity and always informed by a sly Ruschavian pictoriality. Standouts include works by Sharon Ellis, Ingrid Calame, Phil Argent, Jennifer Steinkamp, Monique Prieto, Adam Ross, Yek, and Jack Hallberg.

3 **Michelle Fierro** (*Jack Tilton Gallery, New York*): Fierro deploys constellations of viscous paint blobs, floor scrapings, and other studio detritus across untreated canvas on rectangular stretchers. She adds some marks and smudges, and that's it. The paintings either get you or they don't. Usually they do, but if they don't there are no virtuous fall-back positions. This is win-or-die painting—mandarin grunge—and genuinely affecting in its courageous dishabille.

4 **The Reverend Ethan Acres** (*Patricia Faure Gallery, Santa Monica*): In this collection of images and icons, the Reverend Acres embraces the beast of fundamentalist religion without irony, as Kiefer embraces the beast of German Romanticism, but with more ludic flair. The centerpiece of the show is a reconstruction of Christ as the seven-eyed Lamb of God from the Book of Revelations. Floating six inches off the floor, the lamb glides in a large circle, exuding Gregorian chants, like a redeemed Nauman, eliciting awe and giggles. “I have come to put the fun back in fundamentalism,” the Reverend declares.

5 **Monique Prieto** (*Acme, Los Angeles*): Witty abstraction might seem a contradiction in terms, but Prieto brings it off. At first glance, her computer-designed Color Field paintings allude to Jules Olitski and Helen Frankenthaler; at second glance, we detect the subversive spirits of Chuck Jones and Walter Lantz. The drips defy gravity and the brightly colored stains dearly want to be bubbles, balloons, butts, and breasts.

6 **Jesse Amado** (*Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston*): Those who despair for the future of installation art can take heart from Amado's exquisite intervention in this room at CAM. He has cut sections into the gray wool carpet and rolled it back, cut rectangles into the dead white walls to expose the aluminum studs, installed handsome steel frames around graphite drawings pinned to the wall, and adorned the floor with lead and lilies. In effect, he has turned the room into a poem. Everything is crisp, clear, and infinitely allusive. Amado is a Mallarmé in a field of Wagnerian furniture-movers. It only takes a few.

7 **Elizabeth Peyton** (*Regen Projects, Los Angeles*): La Peyton celebrates the men in her life—rock stars, pals, and acquaintances in these assured works on paper, which somehow evoke both Egon Schiele and *The Little Prince*. Amazingly, the sweetness and candor of these drawings really packs a punch. This probably says more about the art world than it does about Peyton, although it says a lot about her, since the work is clearly less innocent than about innocence. In Lou Reed's phrase, Peyton is hip enough to be square—and gifted enough to taunt us for our anomie.

8 **David Reed** (*The Donna Beam Fine Art Gallery, Las Vegas; Patricia Faure Gallery, Santa Monica; Galerie Rolf Ricke, Cologne*): Reed juxtaposes small abstract paintings with color stills from movies set in Las Vegas, and provides us with running videos of the show's opening nights. (They accumulated as it traveled.) Reed's quick, gestural paintings invest the stills with the aura of post-Conceptual objects, and the stills invest the paintings with cinematic narratives. The videos of people looking at and talking about art insist on the contagious sociability of the tangible, visible world. A sexy manifesto. The best kind.

9 **Mary Heilmann** (*Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles*): In the past few years, Mary Heilmann has taken on the role of Marge to any number of local Barts and Lisas. This selection of nifty paintings provides them with something daunting to aspire to, because no one can do less to greater effect than Heilmann does, or with such caring carelessness. She invests the august practice of abstract painting with the insouciance of a fashion gouache—and still stops us in our tracks. I don't know how she does it. I'm just glad she does.

10 **Artforum's Best and Worst** (*December '94-'96*): This feature used to mark the single, yearly occasion when the rude world of talk intruded upon the nice world of writing—an opportunity for working critics to despise some egregious imposture without investing it with the dignity of an essay. Tender sensibilities, it would seem, have conspired to suppress this tawdry occasion. Now, we have ten bests, no worsts, and everything is all better, if you believe Thumper's mom. And a good thing, too! Otherwise I should have denounced the pathetic mess MoCA made of the Ellsworth Kelly show in Los Angeles, jamming it into undersized, under-lit, and inappropriate rooms, then protecting the crowded, vulnerable art objects with nylon-rope barriers on stainless steel posts so the whole affair looked like a Fred Sandback show with crepuscular wall decorations.

The writings of Dave Hickey were most recently collected in Air Guitar: Essays on Art & Democracy (Alt issues Press, 1997). He lives in Las Vegas.