

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Two Coats of Paint
Marina Adams: Radically soft and optimistic
Sharon Butler
8 February 2017

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Image: Marina Adams

Contributed by by Danielle Wu / Given the influx of politically oriented exhibitions lately, “Soft Power,” Marina Adams’s solo at Salon 94 offers an ethereal mind space that provides relief from all the strain and strife. Wavy blocks of bright color, from lemony yellows to saltwater blues, nest together, embracing each other’s outlines. Standing in front of her grand abstractions is like basking in warm sunlight.



Image: Marina Adams

Dividing her time between studios in New York and Parma, Italy, Adams makes luminous paintings that conjure the stained glass windows inside Italian basilicas and cathedrals—the portals between architecture, nature, and the divine. In works such as 21 (2015) and Soft Power (2016), the forms’ borders have thick outlines that are akin to the leadlines between pieces of glass.



Image: Marina Adams

The space within her paintings is full of optimism and wonderment that is easily dismissed as naïve. In past reviews, her work has been read in painfully gendered terms. A critic once described her color choices as “nursery hues,” and interpreted her soft, biomorphic shapes as feminizations of modernist hard-edge painters such as Robert Mangold or Ellsworth Kelly.

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But “softness” isn’t gender-specific. The title of her exhibition, “Soft Power,” a term coined in the 1990s by political scientist Joseph Nye, counters such sexist essentialism. Nye’s notion of “soft power” focuses on persuasion rather than force — a humanistic approach that feels hopelessly derelict today.

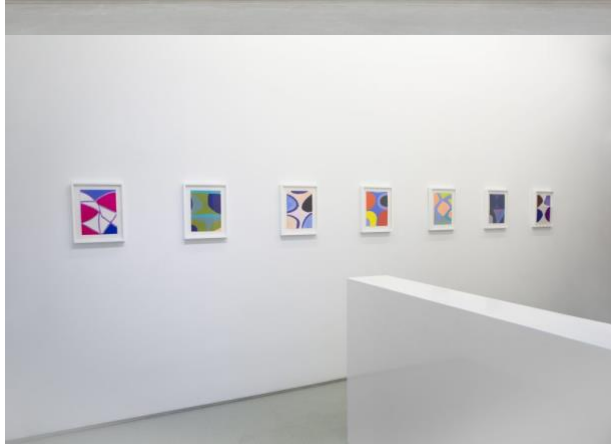


Image: Marina Adams

Adams has said she wants to create space for thought as opposed to dictating it. She is inspired by Alex Katz, whose portraits are illuminated by a warm, frontal light — a flattening quality that Adams brings to her own work. Like Katz, who clearly adores his subjects, Adams paints in sweeping, sensuous strokes that glide generously across the canvas.

In these traumatic times, Adams reminds us that art can provide a healing space, a respite from a dark reality. “Certainly there are artists who get involved in a political and social way,” she says. “For me the act of painting is actually very radical. That in itself, just doing what we do, is taking a stance.”

“Marina Adams: Soft Power,” Salon 94, Lower East Side, New York, NY. Through February 22, 2017.