

Bruce Pearson at Ronald Feldman

A glance at Bruce Pearson's heavily textured paintings brings to mind those of Alfred Jensen.

But the differences are vast—and informative: Pearson's are bigger; their relief is not due to built-up paint but carved Styrofoam; imagery is based not on numbers but on words; and rather than being embedded, shapes seem to dance happily across the field.

In fact, Pearson's works sustain a tone of euphoria. The nine paintings and four gouaches in this show (all 1998 or '99) consist of book titles lettered on surfaces so complicated by hue change or texture that one can barely puzzle them out. The titles supposedly derive from self-help books, but one suspects parody: works on view come from the "Post-Feminist Masculinity" series and the "Recovery Language" series, among others.

But whatever verbal games he plays, Pearson doesn't forget visual interest. The paintings are woozily dazzling. A recklessly careening pattern in *Why Can't Love Come in a Six Pack?* nearly obliterates the widely spaced capital letters spelling out the title. The colored lines woven together on the diagonal in *A Simple Answer* (presumably not directed to *that* question) evoke textile motifs.

Hues are unexpected, pushy, even garish—the *Six Pack* piece is salmon pink over spring green, with a bit of lavender added, while *Answer's* brilliant blue is

spotted with orange, gold and red. An exception is the all-white *Crystal Energy Grids System and Remote Healing*, which has only faint recollections of blue, pink, green and yellow in warped and wavy horizontal lines of illegible handwriting.

The paintings have a busy, dancing sweep from a distance, but up close the carved Styrofoam with its brittle contours and thin edges looks stiff and plotted. Likewise, graphic drama and color are stronger from afar, or in reproduction; intimacy does not become these works.

The compositions of three sunburst paintings—in black, white, and blue/green over red/orange—are as rigid as the carving. They lack the other works' metamorphic sense of play. These three, all titled *Die of Pleasure*, look somewhat like Jay DeFeo's *The Rose* without the obsessiveness.

The gouaches repeat the configurations and titles of some larger reliefs; Pearson must have used them to work out color schemes, since that's what differs. These flat renderings make clear why Pearson's patterns aren't Op art: they have an irregularity that's part organic, part hallucinatory. Who would have thought that lines of roman letters would have such interesting shapes? However, the gouaches lack the glints of reflected light that in the reliefs add to the happy feeling of hysteria.

—Janet Koplos

Bruce Pearson: *No No No . . .*, 1998, oil and acrylic on Styrofoam, 48 inches square; at Ronald Feldman.

