

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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Action Precision

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ARTS & LETTERS

The Afterlife of an Ideal

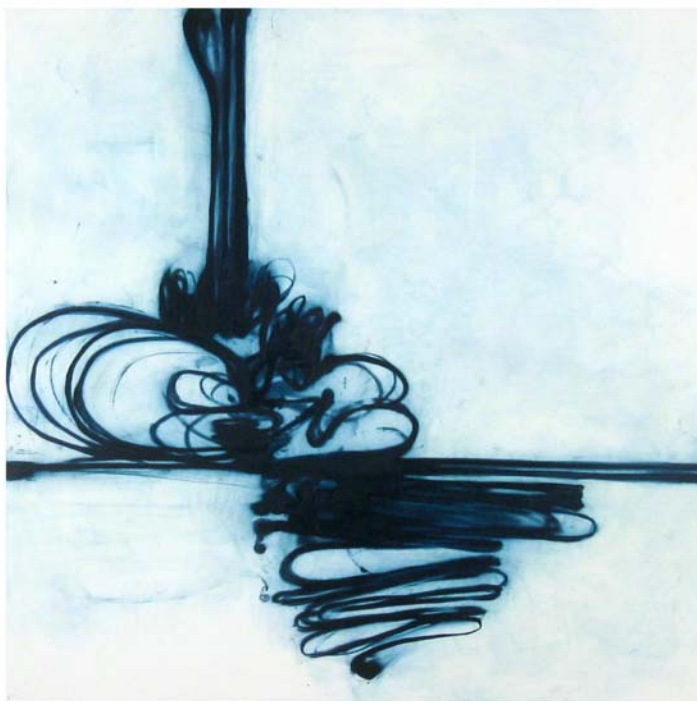
By DAVID COHEN

Where "Neoplastic Redux" alludes to the afterlife of an ideal, "Action Precision" charts the fate of a gesture. The nine-person group show at Lennon, Weinberg is at once critically tighter and formally more diverse than the somewhat spurious Harris ensemble. What these artists have in common is neat spontaneity: They devise systems within which crisp results are uncompromised by wayward yet trusted inflections of the hand.

James Nares takes action and control to fetishistic extremes. In his tasteful "It's in the Books" (2005), a blue totem is built from a fluent yet jerky sequence of broad brushstrokes. You wouldn't know it, but his modus operandi entails an elaborate rigging up of mountaineering ropes to enable him to be suspended over his canvas. Ongoing public relations ensures that one savors the double sense in which he is an "action" painter, Franz Kline meets Spider-man.

More spectacular results are to be had on terra firma. Three examples from Jill Moser's "Blues for Orange" series (2006) build richly dynamic abstraction from frenetic, overlapping lassoes against a light ground. She always maintains a sharp figure-ground distinction, but the ground is animated by fallout from the gestural events. Sam Reveles's linear agitations are more intense: In "English Canto-Dragonfly" (2006), dense accumulations of scribble form a field that is just kept short of filling the whole of his tall, thin canvas.

Craig Fisher exploits blind chance to crystalline effect. He is an inveterate recycler, working on drop cloths or the reverse of failed canvases, building up fugal relationships between marks and stains from the right and wrong sides. The result in "Untitled" (2006) is a suave nonchalance that recalls cool jazz.



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Jill Moser, "Blues for Orange 9" (2006).

Temperature and intentionality alike heat up in Melissa Meyer's masterful "Regale" (2005) a loose, erratic grid of multicolored glyphic squiggles. Both the individual elements and their coordination are a high-wire act between meaning and intuition, freedom and system, abandon and control.

Peter Davis shares Mr. Nare's attraction to the squidgy section created by the point at which a brushstroke changes direction. He exploits a contradiction in speed by capturing gesture as if photographically, emulsifying his brushstrokes in a technique that mixes gloss paint and baked acrylic on a wooden support. Despite the means by which it is recorded, the slick gesture comes across as spontaneous.

Jacqueline Humphries also seems intent on containing wayward gesture within some kind of structural discipline. Her untitled 2006 canvas presents an explosive, translucent splurge of silvery white over steely grays in a virulent, uncouth assault whose sense of precision is defined by its clarity. The paint remains thin and light. The gesturalism seems clamped into place by a superimposed L-shaped section filled in by irregular stripes and drips of orange; this contrastive reality signals circumspection, the precision that keeps watch over her action.

Action Precision until August 11 (514 W. 25th Street, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, 212-941-0012). Prices: \$4,000-\$65,000.