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Carl Palazzolo

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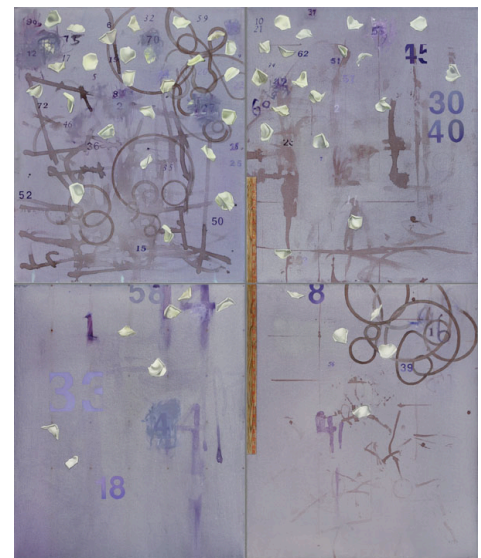
CARL PALAZZOLO *New Paintings*

by Robert Berlind

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Iconographic indications of loss and life's frailty set the tone in Carl Palazzolo's recent paintings. A series of intimate, 12-inch square canvases entitled "Fragrances for Stephen" feature various small, deftly painted, designer bottles of eau de cologne (Caron Royal Bain de Champagne, Guerlain Jicky, Knize Sec, and the like) on washes of modulated color. Floral details and freely looping lines of shifting color embellish them, while a small patch of rougher brushwork may offset the elegance of these motifs with a suggestion of jeopardy. Palazzolo's palette tends toward tertiary hues; aquas, pinks, lavenders, warm siennas, and luminous grays feel like visual equivalents of scents such as those in the bottles. Apart from the explicit subject matter of this group of *momenti mori*, fragrances seem to suffuse all of the show's paintings. A feeling of evanescence pervades these memorials for his close friend, the artist Stephen Mueller, who died in September of 2011.

The larger works, canvases of 40 inches by 36 inches that are sometimes paired as diptychs, were done on drop cloths that had lain posthumously on Mueller's studio floor. Their few spills served as points of departure, so that the painterly commemoration is both indexical and aesthetic. Palazzolo has inflected these slightly stained surfaces with atmospheric modulations of hue, adding multiples of objects, for example floating light bulbs in "Tears of Things #3" (2012) and flower petals in other paintings. Sans serif numbers indicating dates or ages are present in all of the larger works, markers of passing time. Throughout there is the sense that the very act of counting is inherently an expression of time's passage, which is to say the measure of our years. Freely placed curvilinear elements seem to



Carl Palazzolo, "Aesop", 2011, oil, acrylic, ink, and pencil on canvas, 72 x 60". Courtesy of the artist and Lennon, Weinberg, Gallery.

conjure consoling memories of pleasure. Several of these larger works also bear symmetrically placed, hard edged, opaque shapes of gradated grisaille or purple. Like emblems of an impersonal certitude, they define the picture plane, pressing forward in sharp contrast to the paintings' spacious atmosphere.

In the four-paneled "Aesop" (2011), a scattering of pale yellow petals flutters down, seemingly in front of the atmospheric and delicately smudged darker surface. They embody the sad beauty of a season's end. Along the central axis, a yardstick painted actual size—is set against the cool purplish depth of the ground. A possible reminder of Jasper Johns's or Sylvia Plimack Mangold's use of the literal within a play of illusion, it accentuates material facticity. Palazzolo's play of illusion suggests memory, longing, distances, and loss, yet is tempered by reminders of a present physical reality such as the yardstick and paint, seen as simply paint. The elegiac character of his work also recalls Ross Bleckner's painted tributes to lost friends. The paintings' sense of grief, memory, and love is convincing, so much so that even if you were not aware of these being homages, their exquisite beauty and sorrowful aura would remain well after departing the gallery.