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Art in Review

STEPHEN DEAN

Silent Pictures

Sara Meltzer Gallery

525-531 West 26th Street

Chelsea

Through Oct. 17

Stephen Dean has demonstrated an affinity for the more intense reaches of the video palette and the random movements of people, combining them in works that intersect with abstract painting but on their own high-tech terms. A French-American, Mr. Dean made his New York debut in 2001 with “Pulse,” a gorgeous, cathartic video derived from images of the annual spring Holi festival in India — which involves quantities of dry pigment, water and people in the streets — shot in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

In this show Mr. Dean uses monitors only a few inches on a side that are matted and framed like drawings, a device that is a bit precious but that also encourages intense focus. Each monitor plays a short loop of people in motion — restless crowds, a soccer game or rushing pedestrians, for example. The colors and therefore the people are distorted almost beyond recognition, so that the saturated hues of video are revealed in biomorphic shapes that separate and merge repeatedly in constant flux. It is a little like watching paint drip and flow together, but the movements also convey the rhythms of human energy and relationship. Only a few seconds long and scaled perfectly to the human eye, these small works are intensely visual miniatures. Their radiant color is more so for being used so economically and viewed so intimately. Their repeating movements capture an instant of lived life, again and again, which owes something to the tiny looped videos of Paul Pfeiffer. But Mr. Dean has a different goal: namely an abstract, consuming beauty not unlike that of flowers or jewels. ROBERTA SMITH