

Stephen Dean at Sara Meltzer

An exploration of color is central to Stephen Dean's work. In previous exhibitions, the French-born New York artist examined its sociopolitical implications in lush videos such as *Pulse* (2001), shot at a Hindu festival in north India in which devotees douse themselves with powdered and liquid pigments, and *Volta* (2002-03), filmed in a packed soccer stadium in Brazil, which focuses on the bright team banners and colorful outfits of the multitudes of fans. These films explore the ritualistic uses of color in mass culture. By contrast, in this show of recent works, the crowds are absent and Dean touches upon formal and meditative aspects of the theme. Screened on opposite sides of a large gallery, the two video projections at the show's core, *Grand Prix* (2006) and *Vortex (Blue Devil)*, 2007, are, however, as riveting as anything he has done.

Grand Prix is a nerve-wracking yet transfixing loop of a demolition derby in upstate New York. Here, corralled into a muddy racetrack, dozens of jalopies, which the artist had painted in bright colors and outfitted with cameras, fiercely collide. The 7½-minute metal-grinding epic, edited from more than 20 hours of footage, features close-ups of spinning wheels, slamming fenders and crunching car bodies. In some shots, the colorful twisted metal inevitably brings to mind John Chamberlain sculptures and also Gordon Matta-Clark's 1972 film *Fresh Kill*, chronicling the junkyard destruction of his red pickup truck. In Dean's work, the doomed automobiles pound away for the amusement of an unseen audience until the drivers abandon their cars and the track is little more than a heap of scrap metal. Within the context of this giddy orgy of destruction, the film suggests a tongue-in-cheek comment on the state of American culture, or, at least, of macho car culture.

Shot in an industrial-paint factory, *Vortex (Blue Devil)* focuses on swirling vats of pigment, resin and solvents in various areas of the plant. Over the course of the hypnotic 6-minute film, a wide range of colors appears in oo-

ing and dripping tableaux that conjure Roxy Paine's painting machines as well as works of Abstract-Expressionist and Color Field painting. Elsewhere in the show, three recent examples of Dean's "Target" series merge Western and Eastern abstraction in tondi made of reconstructed dartboards. Here, bands of repeated geometric shapes radiate from the center in a kind of Op art and mandala hybrid.

Expanding the exhibition's scope and nearly upstaging everything else on view, five sculptures from the 2007 "Prayer Mill" series filled an upper-level gallery. In these works, small plates of dichroic glass fill tall metal postcard racks. The semireflective prismatic panes cast multicolor rectangles on the walls in the manner of stained-glass windows. As the titles imply, these simple yet refined assemblages transformed the room into an evocative and contemplative space.

—David Ebony

View of Stephen Dean's "Prayer Mills," 2007, postcard racks and dichroic glass; at Sara Meltzer.

