

Art in America

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REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

Christopher Tanner at Pavel Zoubok

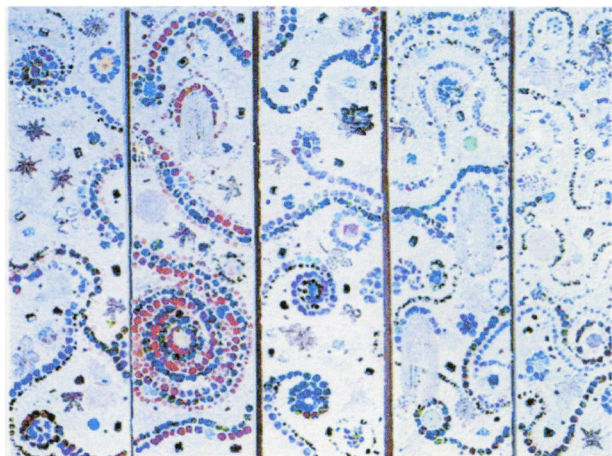
Since the late 1980s, Christopher Tanner has created exuberant paintings and drawings with flashy, trashy materials. By coating surfaces with sequins, faux jewels and other glittering notions, the artist literally foregrounds artifice as the leitmotif of his oeuvre. Too often, however, Tanner has relied on the inherent brilliance of his materials for achieving visual impact. A recent show of five paintings and four drawings helped remedy this shortcoming by introducing a greater compositional sophistication.

Tanner's new works on paper appear to mark a turning point for the artist. Drawing with a liquid adhesive, Tanner creates linear abstractions on narrow sheets of painted paper, then coats the drying glue with glitter. By frequently matching the color of the glitter to its ground, Tanner avoids bold chromatic contrasts and places greater emphasis on his meandering lines. In *Champagne* (2001), for example, spirals, mandalas and other circular designs are stacked on a vertical support. Rendered in white glitter on white paper, this totem of intricate filigree speaks with surprising subtlety, like bits of mica twinkling in a sidewalk.

Perhaps informed by these drawings, the strongest of Tanner's current paintings also feature limited colors and a fluid linearity. The artist has long covered his canvases with sequins, which he embeds in a glitter-encrusted adhesive. Yet the serpentine patterns of his new paintings appear more deliberate, suggesting a greater command of this unorthodox medium. *Black Narcissus* (2002) is a large triptych sheathed in black, gray and iridescent silver paillettes. Working within this restricted range of hues, Tanner traces swirling arabesques with the shiny silver scales that course throughout the triptych. The result resembles an underwater realm, where phosphorescent squid swim in murky darkness.

The ambitious *Unicorn Treats* (2002) also spans multiple supports and functions as a buoyant counterpoint to *Black Narcissus*. Here Tanner unifies five narrow panels with a creamy palette of white, pink and peach-colored paillettes, all nestled in a sugary ground of white glitter. The confectionary quality of this painting is enhanced by sequined appliques that dot the surface like cake ornaments, along with dangling strands of faux pearls. While pushing his tawdry materials to increasingly expressive extremes, Tanner consciously courts the degraded category of decoration, and wears that affiliation like an extravagant badge of honor.

—Matthew Guy Nichols



Christopher Tanner: *Unicorn Treats*, 2002, mixed mediums on panel, 60 by 8 inches; at Pavel Zoubok.