

## GALLERY BEAT By Mario Naves

Reviews of three current art shows

### Julie Evans: Lesson from a Guinea Hen

You'd be hard-pressed to find contemporary art as meticulously executed and tenderly honed as Julie Evans's works-on-paper on display at Julie Saul Gallery. Using acrylic, gouache, colored pencil and what looks to be a superfine grade of glitter, she creates free-floating abstractions that nod to the New York School's improvisatory verities, but gain their authority and allure from Indian art. Evans absorbed its methodologies and traditions while studying miniature painting in New Delhi. She isn't slumming in the conventions of non-Western art. She's a devotee who became the real thing.

Each drawing begins as an isolated puddle of color that is subsequently augmented by imagery: mandalas, botanical motifs and oddments of pattern. Evans reconciles extremes: splashy automatism and deliberate ornamentation; modestly scaled formats and expansive vistas; meditative reveries and The Big Bang. (With Julie Evans' art, you're never sure whether you're looking at the cosmos or into a microscope.) Her punctiliousness as a draftsman compels close inspection of, say, a bead-like trail of circles or an elegant distillation of waves.

The sprightly leaves of a "sprout"—arabesques rendered in pink, pinkish-cream and green—are almost unbearably sharp and slender. Evans, you think, must have the sharpest pencil in the world.

Her palette—filled, as it is, with radiant lemon yellows, musky greens and clarified oranges—is, by turns, electric and silky, crisp and delicate. Given that significant areas of uninflected paper are retained, the drawings aren't unified by the chromatic sumptuousness typical of the paintings: Color plays second banana to drawing.

Perhaps that's why the works-on-paper feel more like displays of virtuosity than a world given heft. When one of our premier colorists downplays her gift, the resulting art can't help but lose something of its reason for being. Evans' paintings are outrageously ravishing; the drawings are merely exquisite. The distinction serves as a reminder that our best artists are often their own toughest competition.

Julie Evans: Lesson from a Guinea Hen at Julie Saul Gallery, through April 11. 535 W. 22nd St. (betw. 10th & 11th Aves.), 212-627-2410.