

# Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS December 2010



View of Craig Kauffman's exhibition "Late Work," showing untitled sculptures, all 2009, acrylic lacquer and glitter on plastic; at Danese.

## CRAIG KAUFFMAN

DANESE

The two circular wall sculptures from Craig Kauffman's "Donut" series, shown in Danese's smaller gallery during this exhibition of his late work, were from 2001, but they provided the kind of *zing* moment that has characterized the experience of his "plastic paintings" since he first started working with vacuum forming and spray painting in the '60s. Kauffman (1932-2010) was initially successful as a painter in conventional mediums—he was in Ferus Gallery's first show, in 1957—and went back to them in the '70s for a time. Yet it was his painting on plastic forms that more famously linked him with Minimalism and with the Los Angeles Light and Space and Finish Fetish movements, the last of which was inspired by car detailing, motorcycle customization, surfboard decoration and other high-color and tightly executed ornamentation.

Kauffman is best known for his bubble works from 1968-70, a form he later revisited. In this exhibition, there were three large (roughly 33 by 40 by 12) and three smaller examples, all with a slightly oblong shape and subtle hues: pale salmon with a dusting of mauve defining the edges, foggy yellow going gray at the perimeter, soft rose-beige with a darker tone defining its separation from the wall. *Mansanas* (2007) is a coppery-peach skin that gives the illusion of a paler tint radiating from deep within. It was also least subject to spotlighting, having been given the advantage of side illumination from a large window facing the open sky. With other bubbles, I had to concentrate on reading the misty colors despite the reflection of three spotlights focused on each. On a second visit to the gallery, the attendant turned off the lights at my request, and the surfaces picked up the gallery's skylight in the same way as *Mansanas*.

I was drawn into the smaller gallery by one of the "Donuts"—irregular loops that are thicker at the bottom. This one has an ivory color that glowed with a pink line where the intensity of the spotlights was diffused by metallic flecks on the plastic.

That was magical enough, but turning left I saw a limpid aqua work from the same series that, under the glare of electric light, had a ring of almost neon blue. The piece seemed to be golden inside, an effect probably created by reflective speckles.

Kauffman's last series, dated 2009, offers a stylized flower form opening out from a flat, hexagonal center that's solidly covered with glitter. On view was one flower in tones of pink with silver-green glitter, another in yellow with a deep pink, and a third—the most complex—which seems to be clear at the edges and morning-glory blue at the blossom's throat, with pinkish highlighting and golden glitter at the center. Kauffman's materials speak of modern chemistry and cheap pop culture, but the forms are calm and the color ethereal.

—Janet Koplos