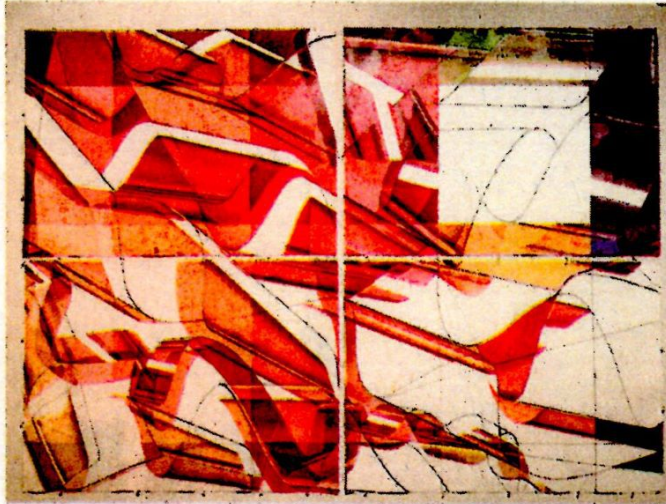


GALLERIES



LULA MAE BLOCTON AND SKOTO GALLERY

Lula Mae Blocton's "SWPO-Shadows, Windows, Purple, Open," from 1990, made from four drawings with colored pencil on rag paper.

Lula Mae Blocton

Through April 30. Skoto Gallery, 529 West 20th Street, Manhattan, 212-352-8058, skotogallery.com.

I encountered Lula Mae Blocton's art for the first time only three years ago in the traveling exhibition "Art After Stonewall, 1969-1989." In that febrile, figure-intensive show her 1975 abstract geometric painting "Summer Ease" was a meditative stopping point. The politics of the era were present but indirect: The colors were those of the rainbow flag, but tonally nuanced and applied to an off-center grid of rectangles. The work didn't directly read as gay or Black, or feminist, which may be one reason Skoto's tight survey of two decades of early work, from 1970 to 1980, curated by Barbara Stehle, is Blocton's first New York City solo since 1978.

It's a beauty. The early geometric oil paintings and wonderful colored pencil drawings, with their stroke-by-stroke textures and blurred contours, have the look of soft woven cloth. With the 1980s, their foursquare geometry splinters into diagonals in adjustable, multipanel compositions. Illusionistic space turns some of these paintings into galactic landscapes. And the interest in prismatic color intensifies: Light, optical and, one senses, metaphorical, becomes a primary subject.

Her work beyond the 1980s has been much influenced by African textile designs, as will no doubt be evident in future shows at Skoto, which is planning a career survey as a series of solo exhibitions shows. I look forward to seeing this visual narrative unfold and to being brought up-to-date on what's happening with this artist-illuminator, who is in her 70s, in the now.

HOLLAND COTTER