



Julie Evans, *Lesson from a Guinea Hen #11* [detail], mixed water-based media and colored pencil on paper (30 x 41 in.), 2009. Courtesy the artist and Julie Saul Gallery, New York

## Julie Evans: Lesson from a Guinea Hen at Julie Saul Gallery, New York

For the Western foreigner, the ubiquity of ornamentation is one of the most compelling differences between India and the West. The backs of buses and trucks are brightly decorated, every taxi or bicycle rickshaw is graced with deities and chains of electric orange marigolds, and

even the spaces above humble doorways are bedecked with painted symbols. Stylistically, this pervasive adornment echoes that found in miniature paintings, which New York-based Julie Evans, who has been visiting India for the past twelve years, has studied closely.

Evans's new work—consisting of acrylic, gouache, and colored pencil on paper—presents an

interesting development in her oeuvre. Two years ago, her paintings were explicitly derived from Indian sources; they depicted intensely vivid mandalas, lotus flowers, and scalloped edges busily layered across the entirety of small wood panels. Now she has reduced the cultural references down to mere formal hints, with delicious pours of gouache in shades of puce, orange-yellow, brown, or gray, adorned with delicate sprays of minute patterning, and surrounded by the calm of white paper. If her former series reflects a cacophonous India, teeming with color and adornment, this new work allows for its inverse: a breath of contemplative emptiness. In these sixteen paintings, mostly divided into two series titled “Lesson from a Guinea Hen” and

“Ahmedabad Drawings,” Evans’s saturated splashes on blank ground form roundish biomorphic shapes that immediately evoked for me the abstracted cosmology and metaphysical leanings of Kandinsky’s *Several Circles* (1926), in which colored discs float on a black ground.

In some of the works, detailed figurative elements—a peacock’s feather, or a fan of neat petals—

emerge from organic pools of pigment. A closer look reveals a sprinkling of tiny dots, swirls, and filigree, as well as swaths of crushed mica that lend sparkle. These subtle additions—like the careful white dots adorning the ragged edges of paint in *Ahmedabad Drawing (crown)* (2008), where they demarcate a turmoil of acidic green and deep brown—add surprise and depth. Miniature painting is traditionally used to depict religious allegories. In the hands of Evans its techniques adorn a very different subject. Her new work conjures images of the origins of the universe as represented by both ends of the earth; highly ornamented deities on one side, drifting bodies of vapor on the other.

—Lyra Kilston