

# Art in America

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## Julie Evans at Julie Saul

Julie Evans's vibrant works resonate on several levels, from the cosmic to the earthly. She has made several trips to India, and studied miniature painting there and in Nepal on a Fulbright scholarship, all of which has greatly impacted her work. Her lush palette is as colorful as a flower market or a sari store. Rendered in acrylic, gouache and pencil on paper and/or wood panel, her rollicking compositions contain patterns of dots, rings, curlicues, flowers, lotus blossoms, arabesques and areas of washy color.

Evans's earlier pieces, as seen in 2004 at Brooklyn's Metaphor gallery, often have open spaces that suggest a figure/ground relationship or a landscape. But these newer works, ranging from 10 by 8 inches to 18 inches square, are busier and more dense, so that the crowded forms often become the ground. Overlapping visual elements give depth to some compositions, as when they seem to be floating over fields of polka-dotted fabric, though they remain very surface oriented.

One recurring element in her work, flower forms and mandalas made with a Spirograph, perhaps resonates with anyone who grew up in the 1960s and '70s. The repetitive act of tracing the toothed plastic discs around the interiors of larger rings to create endlessly fascinating permutations and configurations always did seem meditative to me. Evans's designs are colored in, and often form a radiant nucleus ringed by various decorative elements. She further transforms, and elevates, them by combining them with references to Buddhism and Hinduism. Like a lotus flower rising from the muddy bottom of a pond, these mandalas arise from a lowly, mass-produced toy.

In her recent show at Julie Saul, 19 works (all 2005-06) were grouped by subtle distinctions in palette. Those dominated by hot pink gave way to a series with a more saffron emphasis, to reds and finally cool and acidic greens and blues. In one of two atypically hued works, the violet *Squirt*, whorls of pale blue and



Julie Evans: *Perch*, 2006, acrylic, gouache and pencil on wood, 18 inches square; at Julie Saul.

violet on the lower left emit a bicolored stream that cuts across a mandala configuration on its way to the upper right edge, from which multiple strands of beaded necklaces seem to hang. Some works retain a hint of a figure/ground relationship, such as *Sky Robed Spiro-Zone #3*, in which a pink lotus flower reaches up from a pool of green dots and stripes toward a hot-pink-tipped Spirograph "sun" at the upper right. In all of the works, Evans has painted a border, or frame, around the edge, a self-prescribed limit that is repeatedly violated by flowing lines, bursting spheres and other exuberant forms, as if the works cannot be contained.

Her paintings have an undeniable kinship to those of Beatriz Milhazes, though Evans works on a smaller, more intimate scale. Are Evans's works "better" because of their spiritual component and artistic lineage? Only if you feel the need to be absolved of the "guilty pleasure" of appreciating visually seductive work.

**-Stephanie Cash**