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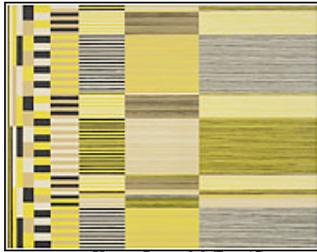
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Art in Review

By THE NEW YORK TIMES
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James Siena
New Paintings and Gouaches

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Kerry Ryan McFate/Courtesy PaceWildenstein

"One, one..." (2005) by James Siena at PaceWildenstein. [More Photos >](#)

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group show at Pace last summer were aberrations. (At least I hope so.) These new efforts both diversify and perfect his slightly crazed, usually colorful linear patterns, which reduce painting to a field of synaptic thin-skinned circuitry not much

PaceWildenstein
534 West 25th Street, Chelsea
Through Jan. 28

Ever since his 1996 New York debut at Pierogi, the illustrious Williamsburg gallery, James Siena's art and career have climbed steadily upward. Now, at 48, he has arrived at PaceWildenstein - one of the art world's center rings - with a terrific show that is also, aesthetically and commercially, just what the occasion demands.

Mr. Siena has filled Pace's big 25th Street space with 35 delectable paintings, drawings and gouaches without succumbing to a postage-stamp effect, resorting to assembly-line production or shifting to a larger size. Evidently the two enormous watercolors he included in a

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larger than the viewer's face, or the artist's fevered brain.

The show also includes the start of something new: a series of more strictly geometric works in cream, ochre, black and yellow. Progressing, left to right, from narrow vertical lines to narrow horizontal ones by passing through short, thick lines that qualify as painted shapes, they evoke the Bauhaus work of Josef and Anni Albers. Still, they are a start.

You could say that Mr. Siena is in a tenure-track position, on his way to filling the gallery's venerated Agnes Martin slot. His paintings are accumulations of repeating marks that achieve a mystical force despite their obvious simplicity. Real estate in New Mexico could be his next move, but maybe not.

Mysticism doesn't seem to be Mr. Siena's thing. His work pushes painting's envelope by seeming to turn inward, but, more compressed than miniaturized, it actually expands painting outward, spiking it with elegant, witty formal contradictions and allusions. Mr. Siena's linear patterns are tantamount to drawing, but rely completely on his sophisticated use of related and contrasting colors for definition. He works by hand, but in materials usually associated with cars and appliances. His inward trajectory has crossed into a large universe of pattern and mark-making and, therefore, a ferocious worldliness.

Mr. Siena's paintings transcend painting to encroach on mathematics, puzzles, manuscript illumination and maps. They elude Western art to evoke Andean textiles, Chinese bronzes, African bark paintings, Persian screens, jewelry and glass-making and calligraphy. These disparate associations, more carefully isolated and combined in individual works than previously in Mr. Siena's art, make this savvy re-arrival the best show of his career. ROBERTA SMITH

Josephine Meckseper

Elizabeth Dee

545 West 20th Street, Chelsea

Through tomorrow

Josephine Meckseper's show is a total environment riven with interesting cracks. Elegantly mirrored, paneled and shelved, it has the stark, slightly too-bright emptiness of an abandoned high-end boutique occupied by style-conscious anarchists. At first the second New York gallery show of this German-born, New York-based artist swings anemically between the obvious and the lazy - not an engaging range of motion. But look

again and the piece functions as walk-in Conceptual Art. Enveloped in a brittle glamour, its desiccated scraps mine the overlap of art, politics and consumerism.

Outside the gallery's soaped-over front door, forlorn window displays acknowledge both the real and the plausible: the Women's House of Detention across the street, and the imminent arrival of a business named DR Gagosian UBS. Inside, a hammer and sickle sit on a mirrored cube, and the Texaco star doubles as the Red Star. A red-and-white sign blares SALE. Mannequins, glass baubles and toilet-bowl cleaners alternate with collages that mix black lace, scraps of Palestinian scarves and Constructivist geometries. One collage mentions the Angry Brigade, a group of British anarchists believed to have bombed more than 100 sites (including a Biba boutique) in the early 1970's, without casualties.

A homemade video of September's anti-war rallies in Washington alternates between color and black-and-white, suggesting past and present protests; the screen is framed in funky tape and cardboard.

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