

Art in America

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SEATTLE

Larry Bemm at Ballard Fetherston

In the abstract paintings of Larry Bemm, guilt-free chromatic hedonism is coupled with laconic formalism. Each work has a fully individual composition and palette, yet all seem related in their loosely put-together appearance. Vertical solid-color sections stand side by side, often intruded on by parenthesislike areas of complementary or contrasting tones, or topped by pale dots.

The 32-year-old artist uses ovals, randomly placed over monochromatic areas, to punc-

uate and animate his broad, oil-painted surfaces, which are often 5 to 6 feet wide and 3 to 4 feet high. Though the brushwork is usually invisible, the overlapping edges of one section cut into adjacent flat areas of color, distantly recalling Clyfford Still, but with a great deal more informality suggestive of improvised drawing.

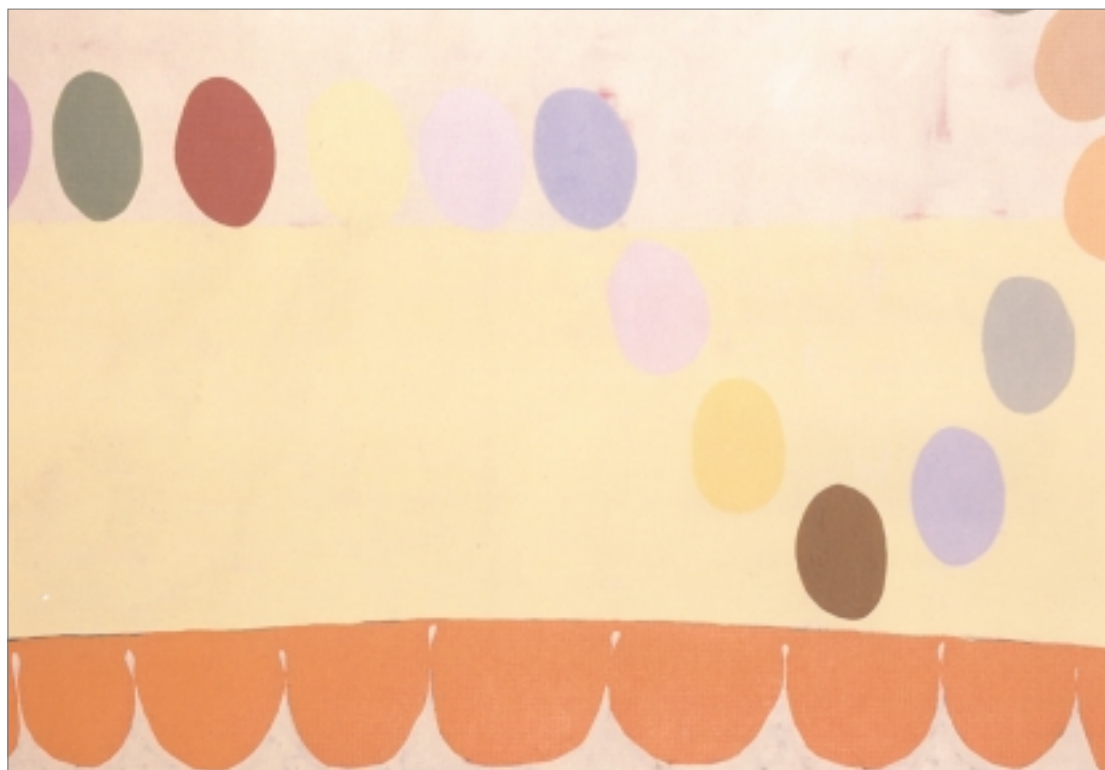
In *Baby Sweet Peas* (2001), *Desalination* (1998) and *Just Below Grade* (2001), the artist traces thin or thick black lines around circles, ovals and trun-

cated capsules to reinforce fencelike side sections. Such allusions to boundaries are offset by frivolous colors such as pink, yellow and pale blue.

More open and freewheeling, three works from 2001, titled *Oh My Land*, *Cocci-Ferrous Seedlings* and *Sweet Italian Baby Sausage*, allow the varied color areas to expand within the canvas frame without any surrounding lines. The latter two works have an irregularly repeated fringelike pattern that anchors the composition.

Around them, Bemm balances meandering or marching rows of dots. With its pale yellow background, *Sweet Italian Baby Sausage* suggests a decorated theater curtain about to rise.

Bemm expresses an optimism and clarity that make no big demands. In this realm of modest claims, the casual, impulsive appearance of the works is moderated by his unerring sense of placement. —Matthew Kangas



Larry Bemm: *Sweet Italian Baby Sausage*, 2001, oil on canvas, 45 by 65 inches; at Ballard Fetherston.