



Getting into shapes

Art: *Larry Bemm's blips; Mark Calderon's myths.*
By Sheila Farr

Larry Bemm's paintings remind me of my cat. She has a demanding, if intangible, agenda that keeps her constantly absorbed, even when asleep. Then, with the tip of her tongue just barely protruding, her face looks intensely pur-

Larry Bemm: New Paintings

Linda Cannon through September 29

Mark Calderon: Sculpture

Greg Kucera through September 29

poseful, scrunched with the effort of sustaining turbulent dreams. That's how Bemm's paintings are. They are so seriously absorbed in their own being, that it doesn't really matter if *we* don't know exactly what's going on. It is a pleasure to look at something so sure of its own rightness.

Bemm paints big and loose, with dots, blips, splotches, slits, and something like modified kiss marks punctuating his dryly brushed, buoyant abstractions. He strings together ovoids like chain-link potatoes, and sets groups of cylinders churning like pistons. Bemm's veneration of Philip Guston's paintings comes across in those potato and cylinder forms, in the sun-glare colors amplified with white. But Bemm takes his abstractions further, and he has a giddier palette. What Bemm strives for, and at best achieves, is what Guston was a master of: simple forms that aren't idle. Bemm's compositions, with their saucy titles, stay busy planting ideas: some droll, some ominous. On the droll side, I liked *The Original Nightmare*, a pared-down portrait. What we see—sort of—are huge pink slug-like legs protruding from a chartreuse mini-skirt pockmarked with orange. I sup-



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pose to truly scare an artist, a nightmare must be aesthetically incorrect.

Linda Cannon's gallery is newly bisected and the arrangement doesn't work very well for this show. With a partial wall across the main gallery, Cannon has squeezed a second show—photographs and installation pieces by Heidi Fichter—into the big room, which in turn squeezed some of Bemm's "Lotus Series" canvases into the tiny back sitting room. A couple of paintings got crowded behind the front desk, most notably the delightful *Celebrating Teddy's Spine*—which turns a spinal column into something like a train of Toot-

sie Rolls. The piece can't be viewed straight on due to its awkward position on the wall. Recently transplanted here from Chicago, Bemm is only 25, and his fresh and uncomplicated energy dominates the gallery. I look forward to following his work.

A block away at Greg Kucera's gallery, Mark Calderon is further down the path of his career. His sculpture shows intelligence and formal refinement. It is also audacious. There's a sexual subtext to Calderon's imagery that is metaphoric, rather than erotic, and all the more startling because of it. For example, the small cast-glass piece called *Dolorosa* suggests, in form and title, the