

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW
BY ROBERTA SMITH
April 26, 1996

Suzanne McClelland Paul Kasmin Gallery 74 Grand Street SoHo Through May 11

Suzanne McClelland continues to expand her riffing, loquacious painting style, fusing language, gesture and material into a hybrid of Conceptualism, Process Art and Abstraction. Three of the six paintings in her new show (in the smaller of two rooms) are especially good, showing new ways to use words to push space and feeling around. Their signal characteristic is a gritty emptiness and lack of color. The emotional-spatial push-pull is accomplished by a relatively restrained deployment of charged words across gently splattered surfaces that might almost have been left out in the rain. This is an interesting departure from Ms. McClelland's more characteristic all-over density of word and gesture, visible, and still effective, in the remaining three canvases.

In one of the emptier paintings, called "Purfikt," the word "perfect" (spelled correctly) is isolated in a little balloon that floats above a burned-out campfire of word fragments, all of this on a surface of dusty, found-object decrepitude. (It makes you think of Oldenburg's "Street" pieces, which Ms. McClelland may have studied in the recent Guggenheim retrospective.) In the painting to the right, letters repeating "goodbye" are ushered off the canvas amid teary little globs of synthetic medium or are crowded into a narrow tunnel; both departures are forced by a loose regiment of long spidery letters, spelling out more goodbyes, that populate the left of the canvases like ghosts.

Ms. McClelland's accident-prone surfaces may owe something to Sigmar Polke's aqueous expanses, or to her new excursion into photography. Also on view is a suite of 18 photographs of the artist's small, snail-like clay sculptures, their surfaces supplemented with marks in chalk and crayon and washes of gesso, creating visionary little worlds that again offer a suggestive mix of media and feeling.