

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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Comfort Food for the Soul and Drunk on Pulp Fiction

Soothing paintings by John Evans, Mexican pulp art and labor-intensive works by Hadieh Shafie



Hadieh Shafie's 'Transition 4,' 2014, is on view at Leila Heller. PHOTO: JASON FAGAN/HADIEH SHAFIE/LEILA HELLER GALLERY, NY

Hadieh Shafie: Surfaced

Leila Heller

568 W. 25th St., (212) 249-7695

Through April 11

A lot of art is both eye-boggling and pretty. But not nearly as much art also conveys some kind of depth beyond its hyper-decoration. The labor-intensive wall objects of Iranian-born (1969) artist Hadieh Shafie manage that considerable feat. Or rather, the best pieces in the exhibition, along with parts of others, do.

Ms. Shafie constructs the central feature of her best work by beginning with an inch-wide strip of paper—whose thin out-facing edge is painted with bright color or black beforehand—wrapped around a dowel (which is ultimately removed). What she ends up with looks like a psychedelic geode. Ms. Shafie then glues hundreds of these rolls tightly together onto a backing inside a white frame of some non-rectangle configuration. The results possess the liveliness of what used to be called Op Art, but without any of the wincing that style used to cause. The outstanding work in the show is “Ghalb 7” (2014), a teardrop shape about a yard wide, with “Transition 4” (2014), a 5-foot-in-diameter tondo, not far behind. Both are rich meditations on visual pleasure.

There’s a catch, however. The strips of paper are each inscribed in Farsi with the word “eshgh,” which means love or passion, and that in turn is supposed to lend Ms. Shafie’s work some additional gravitas. To an outsider to Ms. Shafie’s culture such as I, the addition of a linguistic gambit is more a conceptual abstraction than heartfelt poetry. Such are the limitations of cross-cultural art criticism.

—Mr. Plagens is an artist and writer in New York.