

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

LISA HOKE

3/1/09

NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART AND ELIZABETH HARRIS

By Nancy Princenthal



NEW BRITAIN Pure color and pure joy are seldom as close as they are in Lisa Hoke's *The Gravity of Color, New Britain* (2008). Assembled onsite at this Connecticut museum and scheduled to remain until 2010, the monumental mosaic of thousands of paper and plastic cups is centered on a 30-foot-high wall next to a floor-to-ceiling window, though it spreads to an adjacent wall and leaps the window to a third wall on the other side. The fourth in a series of related installations that began at the Addison Gallery of American Art at Andover in 2005 and have grown bigger and bolder with each incarnation, it is a kind of full-throated hue and cry.

With a roughly pinwheel-shaped overall configuration, this version of "The Gravity of Color" puts into motion flaring fields of vivid rainbow shades that break up, as one approaches, into eddies and small whirlpools of pattern and tone. The paper cups are arranged by their given color, matched with paint swirled inside the clear plastic ones. All are individually screwed to the wall, either sideways or head-on, and sometimes, in the latter case, stacked mouth to mouth or foot to foot to form little towers that edge out into the viewing space. Where the two adjoining walls meet, the protruding cups intersect, knitting together with an edge-of-chaos brinkmanship that can be felt, to some degree, throughout the installation. Liza Lou and Tara Donovan both come to mind, though Hoke, who began coaxing surprising structures out of assemblages of common objects some time before either (and has been exhibiting her work for nearly 25 years), is more attuned to the music of pure abstraction.

At Elizabeth Harris, Hoke presented 10 discrete objects (all 2008). The scale is intimate: you have to come in close to savor the tiny flares of blue, green and red at the heads of matches lined up in a Sean Scully-like grid (*Zig*), or to enjoy the surprise of discovering it is again match heads that provide the spiral of changing colors in a cylindrical sculpture hung on the wall like a roll of paper towels (*Roll*). Paper and plastic cups, along with matchbooks wedged between them with their spines facing out, are assembled in *Plaza 3-4800* (the title, a telephone number spelled out the old fashioned way, is from a matchbook), which could be an easel-painting-size detail from a recent installation; the more attenuated, meditative *Blue* is similarly made of plastic cups, Tupperware and takeout containers. *Flag*, a particularly Tuttle-esque work hung near the ceiling, is a semaphore of pure color—a rectangular piece of red theatrical lighting gel suspended limply from the end of a metal arm, it casts a perfect rose-colored rectangle on the wall. In *Squared Off*, a cataract of cardboard 35mm slide mounts, fitted imperfectly with squares of orange and yellow gels, tumbles off the wall; the gels dapple the wall beneath with what looks like late afternoon light. The mounts are joined with tiny metal hinges, suggesting that the whole arrangement could be folded up and carried away: a *boîte-en-valise* of sunshine.