



Andrea Belag, *Untitled (Cuba Series # 23)*, gouache on paper (17x14 in.), 2001. Courtesy Bill Maynes Gallery, New York.

Andrea Belag. Bill Maynes Gallery, New York.

Andrea Belag's abstract paintings interlock bands of rich color within a somber network of dark stripes and rectangles. Viewing them is like detecting the glow of a party through a series of closed windows and doors. Recently, however, Belag appears to be unlocking the gates and unbarring the entrance to this world in a surprisingly open and playful new group of 13 small gouache and watercolor works on paper that are partly inspired by the facades of Cuban houses.

Several key visual elements emerge in these new works. One is a kind of central opening surrounded by large dark rectangles. In *Untitled (Cuba Series #18)*, for example, we seem to be looking out of a

window. Viridian brushstrokes look like windblown ferns surrounded by dark maroon bands. In numbers 17 and 19 from the series a horizontal band of liquid vermilion suggests sunset in Havana. Other works in the series remain purely abstract. Number 24 comprises a stack of rectangles in bright blue, alizarin crimson, chocolate, and navy hues, while number 13 contrasts pure bright colors with blocks of milky tans and grays.

Untitled (Cuba Series #23) has a little of everything; it is both materially abstract and effusively poetic. The work depends as much on the limpidity of the watercolor as on the substantiality of the opaque gouache. A cobalt blue stripe runs up the paper, a little right of center. It hems a rectangle of tarry steel-blue gouache, applied thickly, as if straight from the tube. In the interior, cloudy watery light evokes the tropics after the rain. But it's just as easy to forget about the references to the landscape and see it as a bitumen candy bar with a milky center.

In truth, the variety and size of Belag's brushstrokes and the range of color and light accommodate many flights of fancy. *Untitled (Cuba Series # 26)* looks like a wooden door on a dusty cloud. Washy colors surround an interior stack of squares and create an effect similar to rubbed pastel. There's invention everywhere, and these works on paper will, no doubt, push Belag's paintings into uncharted territory. But they do also convey a newfound generosity of spirit in their own right.

--Joe Fyfe