

## TRACING THE GROOVES WITH YOUR FINGERS

by Kees Keijer

## Painting & Performance Pino Pinelli, Elsa Tomkowiak, and Mary Sue

Marsha Plotnitsky, the driving force behind The Merchant House on the Herengracht, makes a surprising suggestion when I meet her on a visit to her stately art space. Vividly colored artworks on the walls are by the Italian artist Pino Pinelli (1938). Plotnitsky says: "The point is that you can touch them."

That is of course an unusual thing to do with art, and certainly in this case: the works strike one as too fragile. is in fact solid and the works

Their surfaces are so intensely colored that the pigment seems to have been scattered across them in thick layers. In this sense, they are a little reminiscent of the early works of the British sculptor Anish Kapoor, who often submerged his sculptures under layers of pure pigment.

### Three-Dimensionality

When you do indeed touch the works of Pinelli, the color are overall much harder than you would have expected. At the same time, you feel the urge to trace the surface's grooves with your fingers. In so doing, you are repeating the very gesture of the artist: he made the work by carving tracks in the material with his fingertips.

In the '70s Pinelli decided to take painting in a new direction by granting sculptural qualities to his works. A painting's

rectangular frame gave way to Pinelli's shaped canvases. The flat plane of the canvas was turned into three-dimensional objects on the wall, a subtle but dramatic difference. By further inviting his viewer to touch the works, he added a supplementary performative gesture.

#### Children's Drawings

The Merchant House this time combines the work of Pinelli with the art of two French artists of a younger generation; and the performative aspect is of great importance for them as well. Mary Sue (1979) presents a video projection next to one of Pinelli's shaped canvases. In it, she plays the role of a sign language interpreter who is engaged in explaining Pinelli's work.

In addition, The Merchant House presents a series of Mary Sue's works on paper—these are enigmatically based on children's drawings. The scratchy lines, which spread out onto the passe-partouts, at first appear to have been scanned and printed out by a computer, as if made up of pixels. But, upon closer

inspection, they turn out to be unquestionably handdrawn to the slightest detail. The third artist, Elsa Tomkowiak (1981) is represented by a group of sculptures made of foam, pounded with pigment. Tomkowiak—whose colorful tunnel of plastic strips is in the meantime on view as part of Amsterdam's ArtZuid Sculpture Biennale magically creates a rainbow of colors in the soft, porous material. This appears to go hand-in-hand with a great deal of physical effort and turns the making of these

works into a performative act in and of itself. A found mattress sliced length-wise into five parts is in her hands transformed into a wondrous explosion of color.

# "The sculptures made of foam are saturated with pigment"

A work of Elsa Tomkowiak. Photo by Gert Jan van Rooij. ↓

