

Biography

Polly Apfelbaum was born in 1955 in Abington, Pennsylvania. She studied at the Tyler School of Art, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania and SUNY Purchase College, Purchase, New York. Apfelbaum has exhibited extensively in the America and Europe; recent solo exhibitions include: *Monochromes 2003–2007*, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2008); *Love Sculpture*, Frith Street Gallery, London; *Love Street*, Angles Gallery, Santa Monica, California (2007). Recent group exhibitions include: *Notations: The Closing Decade*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania (2008); *Comic Abstraction: Image Breaking, Image Making and Lines, Grids, Stains, Words*, both at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; *Pink*, Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Bombay (2007). Apfelbaum currently lives and works in New York.

Exhibition supported by Frith Street Gallery, London, The Henry Moore Foundation and The Locks Foundation

The Henry Moore Foundation

Talks & Events

In Conversation:

Polly Apfelbaum and David Batchelor

Saturday 31 January, 3pm, free
Join Polly Apfelbaum and artist and writer David Batchelor as they discuss Apfelbaum's work. Booking is essential on 01908 676 900.

The Open University and Milton Keynes Gallery – working together to support public debate on contemporary art.



Talkback

Saturday 28 February, 1–2pm, free
Join a member of the education team for an informal discussion-based tour of the Polly Apfelbaum exhibition. Talkback tours include audio description of all works discussed during the tour. There is no need to book.

Live Guides

Volunteers will be available to provide visitors with information about the exhibition and to encourage discussion every Saturday from 10am–12pm & 2–4pm during the exhibition.

Saturday Art Trolley

Every Saturday, 11am–1pm
A drop-in session featuring free art activities based on the exhibition. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Suitable for ages 4–12.

Education programme supported by John Lewis

John Lewis

Access

BSL interpretation is available on request; prior notice is required. A guide for blind and partially sighted visitors can be arranged with two weeks notice. Please call the Gallery on 01908 676 900 to arrange.

Milton Keynes Gallery

900 Midsummer Boulevard
Central Milton Keynes, MK9 3QA
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Recorded Info: 01908 558 307
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Email: info@mk-g.org
Website: www.mk-g.org

Gallery Open

Tuesday – Saturday 10am–5pm; Thursdays open late until 8pm; Sundays 11am–5pm
Closed Mondays

Milton Keynes Gallery is supported by Arts Council England, South East; Homes & Communities Agency; Milton Keynes Council; Milton Keynes Theatre & Gallery Company



A large print copy of this leaflet is available on request from the Information Desk.

Polly Apfelbaum

Anything can happen in a horse race

31 January – 22 March 2009

This is the first solo exhibition in a UK public gallery by American artist Polly Apfelbaum. Her work is characterised by a compelling investigation into colour and form. Apfelbaum has become widely known for her vivid woodblock prints and use of dyed fabric. In the past few decades she has created installations of work by staining pieces of synthetic velvet with dye and arranging them in sprawling patterns as expansive floor-based installations. Describing them as 'fallen paintings' these works are both painting and sculpture, engaging colour, form and surface.

For her exhibition at Milton Keynes Gallery, Apfelbaum presents a series of new installations that run through the three gallery spaces. In a significant departure for Apfelbaum, these works use what appear to be offcuts of highly reflective, sequined fabric. Imported largely from the Far East in brash and bold colours, her choice of material typically reflects her audacious tendency to court the kitsch. Each piece is named after a famous American gambling city: *Las Vegas*, *Atlantic City* and *Reno*. The sequined stretch-fabric material has associations with the glitzy or faded glamour of these showy cities – the costumes of showgirls and entertainers. The light plays on the surface of the material, changing as the viewer moves or shifts. The work is improvised, yet characteristically for Apfelbaum it embodies a structure, a clear logic as the colour palette used is that prescribed in the manufacturer's official colour series.

Ultimately in this series of work, Apfelbaum is interested in the idea of cutting as a form of drawing, directly manipulating the material at hand. Laid directly on the gallery floor, these irregular shapes and forms cut from lengths of fabric, enhance the empty or negative spaces. Created on-site and in response to the specifics of the gallery space, the installations are perhaps more situational than her previous body of work. The work also has a performative dimension; it is about making, process, experimentation and celebrating the exhibition as an event in itself.

The following text is an interview between artist Polly Apfelbaum and critic and writer Morgan Falconer which took place in New York, Autumn 2008.

MF: Where does the name 'Apfelbaum' come from?

PA: It's German, it means 'apple tree'. I think it's a made-up Jewish name – I've heard that when Jewish people immigrated at the turn of the century, they made up names like this. Actually, it's quite common.

MF: Last year you started to work with sequined fabric. What attracted you to the material?

PA: I think it's a logical extension of my previous work. In the past I've used crushed, stretched, synthetic velvet, which is also a slightly tacky material with cheap connotations, used in fashion craft and decoration, not art. Also, as the work got to be more about drawing, and the space of the floor, sequined fabric seemed like the right material for this formal investigation – more hard-edged, as opposed to the softness of the velvet. It almost has the feeling of metal. The sequins are the most active material I've ever used, they catch light, and if the light reflects they even sometimes disappear. Some of the sequins are dented, so they produce a different reflection – kind of holographic. It's like cheap magic.

MF: You've decided to make all the work for the Milton Keynes show when you arrive in the gallery. Why not fabricate it first in the studio?

PA: This is something I've never done before, but part of the idea of this new work is that it's always made for the place – I don't really like the word site-specific, I prefer 'situational', but in any event, it's important for me that the work is made in reaction to the place. There is an element of performance, and I think it helps move the work away from the object, thinking of it more as a series of relationships, both in space, but also in time – the piece only exists for the duration of the show.

MF: What are you planning to do for the show?

PA: I'm doing three rooms – a black room, a silver room, and a multi-coloured room. I like the graphic possibilities of black – you'll really see the negative/positive shapes. And with the silver, I love the idea that it's like a disco ball – it catches more colours than any of the other materials. And the multi-coloured room will use thirteen colours, that's all the available colours from a single manufacturer's line. I like the fact that this is someone else's system of colour.

MF: Why restrict yourself to those colours?

PA: There is a long history in my work of using found systems of colour and I've never thought of it as a restriction. I used hair colours in the 'Powerpuff' series (2000), and I used all the colours in one particular dye set for *Ice* (1998). For me, once the rules are in place there is more room to move.

MF: You're titling the pieces after three great American gambling cities.

PA: Yes – Las Vegas, Reno and Atlantic City. They all relate to the palette I'm using. The multi-coloured one will be *Las Vegas* – it's the gaudiest and has the mix of new kitsch and old. *Atlantic City* will be black, because it's probably the most depressed. And *Reno* is washed out, it has a strong desert light – think of a sequined showgirl on the morning after. Reno is a kind of Las Vegas wannabe. It calls itself the 'biggest little city in the world'. I like that corny, aspirational quality. During the day, everything looks banal, but at night it transforms. There is a lot of the old neon, which has been replaced in Vegas.

MF: Although the new work is similar to your earlier work, in that it's floor-based sculpture, it's different in that it invites the viewer to enter its space.

PA: Yes, this is the first work I've made in a while that you can walk in and around and about. The floor is obviously important in my work, and one of the reasons I like it is because I love the physicality it suggests – it's very literal. But I don't think I've been using the floor as an equal partner. This new work involves using the negative space that the sculpture creates. The sequins also invite participation because their colours shift and move with the viewer. I think these pieces feel more sculptural than most of my work.

MF: The forms in the new work are reminiscent of earlier styles of abstract painting, like geometric abstraction and biomorphism. Did you intend to revisit those styles?

PA: I want it to have the feel of a kind of automatic, unconscious, experimental form of abstraction, a sense of Dada, Surrealism – Arp and Miró. They were hard-edged, but still loose. So it's not a rationalist geometry – maybe in another life I was a hard-edged painter! I love a dialogue with the past, and I'm interested in quirky abstract painters who don't fit into the usual camps – people like Paul Feeley and Larry Poons. David Smith used to talk about drawing in space, and of course with the cut-outs there is a Matisse reference. Maybe they're all there, or not there; it comes with the territory, but they aren't conscious quotations.

MF: You talk about the smaller passages in these large works as still lifes. Why do you think of them in this way?

PA: This goes back to the idea of the work as leftovers – discards and offcuts from other pieces. The larger sections are more spatial, they activate the floor and interact with the space. The smaller areas are more figural, they occupy space locally (like a still life on a table top maybe), they invite a kind of looking that for me is like a still life. It's intimate – looking also at the objects, and the empty spaces between objects.

A full version of this interview appears in the February/March issue of *Art World* magazine.