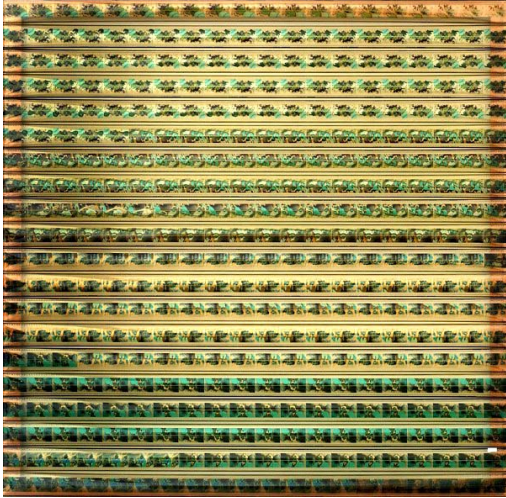


# artnet®

**D.C. Diary**  
by Tyler Green



"Carter Potter: We Cure Everything," Jan. 9-Feb. 21, 2004,  
at Numark Gallery, 625-27 E Street NW, Washington, D.C.  
20004

I want to dislike Carter Potter's work, I really do.

It's bling-bling for the wall in your life. It's bright and shiny, kind of like a new toy or a Jeff Koons work, which may be the same thing. It puts that R.E.M./B-52s song *Shiny Happy People* in my head. I am not a shiny, happy people kind of person. Potter's art should annoy me.

Except. . . except I like it.

I am powerless to resist. Have you ever looked at a painting by Bridget Riley or Thomas Downing and found yourself unable to look away because you're caught in the Op Art effect? That's me with Carter Potter. Potter's paintings are confectionary art for the movie-loving set. They are full of lollipop wishes and Jelly Belly dreams. Bully for that.

Potter's works aren't exactly paintings, but they're close. Each artwork is made out of 70mm IMAX film wrapped horizontally across a painting stretcher. Everything about them reads like a painting: the way they hang on a wall, the use of a stretcher (which is plainly visible through the film), the mix of abstraction and figurative elements.

Potter, who lives and works in Los Angeles, has been making work like this for over ten years. He seems not to run out of new things to do with film, which is a credit to his imagination. For years he made his work from only the colorful leaders and feet of film stock. The paintings that Potter built from that material were bright, visually bouncy abstractions. The new work, which is at Numark Gallery in Washington now, includes scenes from movies, including nature films and *The Lion King*. The nature film-derived paintings are built into abstract patterns while the *Lion King*-derived work is more narrative.

"We Cure Everything" is wonderfully installed and takes full advantage of the possibilities of Numark's new space on E Street, a few steps off of Washington's bustling Seventh Street arts and entertainment strip. There are no light sources in Potter's paintings, so they look best when drenched in wattage. Here, 11 Potters are lit by 25 lights, 2,370 watts in all. Perfect.

Some of that light goes right through the film, bringing good things to life. Some of it, where the wrapped film is crowned, reflects back at the viewer, making it seem as if light is emanating from each painting. The more brightly lit each painting is, the more color-soaked it is, the shinier it is. Mmmm, shiny things.

While the initial appeal of Potter's work is their color and finish, upon closer inspection they reveal all manner of clever merriment. One of Potter's smaller works, *We Cure Everything (Purple Penguin)*, starts at the top of the painting as a fuzzy purple abstraction. By the bottom half, a simple narrative takes over and Potter presents a hopping purple penguin. Whee!

Other Potters also feature film-related narratives. Like *We Cure Everything (Purple Penguin)*, they focus on short parts of film scenes and follow them, in the visual art version of super slo-mo, through a simple activity. In *We Cure Everything #4 (Zebra)*, the surface of the painting is open and colorful at the top and becomes dense with zebras by the bottom. In between we see a bird taking flight over a series of frames.

Potter's work could inspire a variety of thoughts about art as object, the future of painting, and the way Potter's work updates stained glass by substituting polyester for glass. There are interesting things to be said about each of these topics.

However, it's difficult to think about the relationship between film strips as a 21st-century art material and colored glass as a centuries-old art material when you're standing a few feet from Potter's work. It's difficult to think about how Potter makes unique objects, personal in scale, from the second-most prevalent form of mass media: film. There's also plenty to be said about how Potter is continuing a decades-long deconstruction of painting, a la Frank Stella, Sigmar Polke and, more locally, Jason Gubbiotti.

But ultimately, I find looking at Potter's paintings to be like staring at a beautiful woman -- I become so caught up in the woman's visual appeal that for a while it doesn't matter if her IQ is higher than that of an eggplant.

Even after coming home from looking at Potter's paintings I'm not sure how much I care about the left-brain aspect of his work. After all, it is at this point that a serious art critic would grab hold of his lapels and start pontificating about how Potter's work is an example of postmodernism at its apex, a textbook case of how an artist has mined the refuse heap of popular culture and regurgitated -- *in the best possible way* -- new work that continues one artistic tradition while also creating something new. I assign anyone who relishes in that type of thinking to save it, and instead sermonize about postmodernism in the upcoming Douglas Gordon show at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. For me: Mmmm, shiny things.

**TYLER GREEN** writes about art from Washington. His blog can be found at [modernartnotes.blogspot.com](http://modernartnotes.blogspot.com).

- <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/reviews/green/green2-12-1.asp>, 2004