

# REGEN PROJECTS

Smith, Roberta. "Sue Williams: Project for the New American Century." The New York Times (October 10, 2008) p. C32 [ill.]

## The New York Times



Vicious chaos: "Small Kill Teams" (2008) by Sue Williams

## SUE WILLIAMS

Project for the New American Century

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525 West 19th Street, Chelsea

Through Oct. 25

Sue Williams seems to be doing the right thing: returning to Square 1 to plot a different development from the works that first established her reputation. Dating from the mid-1980s, they were crude, cartoonish grisaille paintings of unspeakable yet hilarious crimes against women, committed by members of both sexes and usually narrated by speech balloons or captions rife with obscenity.

They brought feminist anger to a scathing boil and skewered the pieties of political correctness. They were rowdy, unresolved works, perhaps, but they fulfilled an ongoing ambition to bring together painting and politics with a power that Ms. Williams has not matched since.

That may be because she has been trying to wedge abstraction into the equation, making works in two or three colors where small images are distributed on the canvas, creating all-over patterns reminiscent of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings and Willem de Kooning's late work. The little images maintain a certain level of repulsiveness and sexual reference, especially when seen up close, but it is not the same. In order for the details to read, Ms. Williams had to neaten up her technique so much that she was drawing rather than painting.

Ms. Williams's latest efforts are her best attempt so far at making the equation succeed, at least in the smaller works — reverse paintings on acetate — that open the show. In these she has expanded her palette and messed up her surface. She's painting again; the bulging, spurting, oozing forms intimating sex, violence, bodily fluids and internal organs are in your face again. Titles like "Country First" and "Small Kill Teams" and "1-800-Empire" particularize the mood of vicious ineptitude. They may look too much like a mixture of de Kooning, John Alton and Peter Saul, but they are a start.

The larger, pricier items in the main gallery should be the last of their kind. The palette narrows down to contrasting shades of one or two colors, and the all-over patterns lock in. The nastiness of the shapes is more overt, but the paint handling is so neat as to be mechanical. They could almost be printed textile or wall paper designed by some lapsed Disney animator, addled into rebellion by years of family fun. That they are made by Ms. Williams is an impressive feat, but that doesn't diminish their by-the-yard deadness. Ms. Williams has much better things to do with her rage-driven talent, and now she seems to know it. ROBERTA SMITH