

ARTS | ART IN REVIEW

ART IN REVIEW; Steven Charles

By ROBERTA SMITH APRIL 28, 2000

Nowhere Fast

Pierogi 2000

177 North Ninth Street

Williamsburg, Brooklyn

Through May 8

Steven Charles, who is making his solo debut at the age of 33, is not just another dot painter. He takes this convention, already in wide use, to new extremes of density and obsessiveness. Working in bright enamels, Mr. Charles covers his canvases with dizzying, pulsating networks of dotted lines, bull's-eyes and targets. Control and randomness are regularly contrasted, making it clear that the paintings are made up as they go along.

The lines, which are mostly made by dripping or pouring paint, can be of any length; they form random swirls or whorls or are marshaled into parallel sequences or grids. (And several of these arrangements can be layered together in a single work.) In addition, Mr. Charles makes extensive use of concentricity, outlining an irregular splatter or pour with several colors, or filling in the crevices. The results, suggestive of crazed city maps or circuitry diagrams, is all pattern all the time, with little in the way of background and sometimes no room to breathe.

What's interesting, perceptually, is the process of finding room, of seeing and appreciating the respite provided by shifts in the patterns' pace, rhythm, color or spatial depth. When these aren't abundant enough, as in the large painting "Bury Ugly Whole," the work tends to congeal into a single unaerated mass of pattern, and Mr. Charles's dazzling sense of craft never gets off the ground. ROBERTA SMITH