

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1994

Art in Review

-
- The exhibition as a work of art ■ Large paintings writ small ■ Autumn leaves and ghosts, romping
 - Words and pictures, yesterday and today.
-

Suzanne McClelland

Paul Kasmin Gallery
74 Grand Street
SoHo
Through Nov. 5

Suzanne McClelland's floor-to-ceiling abstract paintings have been memorable for their scale, their incorporation of words, and the unsettling organic effect produced by the thick opaque gels that seem to ooze from their surfaces. Their implications of both distressed, inarticulate speech and physical decay made them seem very much at home in the charged environment of the last Whitney Biennial.

Reduced in size, as they are in this show, Ms. McClelland's paintings look more ordinary, but they still hold the eye. The broad-gestured, slightly crazed dishevelment of the earlier work has been replaced by a more concentrated layering of textures and patterns. Intertwined clusters of loops and letters drawn in charcoal peek out from beneath pigment. Earth colors are shot through with pink and metallic copper paint. Bodily imagery shows up in the form of brown modeling clay applied to the canvas, suggesting both fecal matter and brittle vertebrae.

Ms. McClelland draws upon the past (Arshile Gorky and Jackson Pollock riffs are everywhere), and despite her continued engagement with building surfaces, she is capable of delicate effects, as in a case of calligraphic skeins of black paint dripped across a white canvas. In many ways, this is basically postwar gestural abstraction with attitude: tougher, grosser, possibly less romantic, but with similar expressive ambitions.

HOLLAND COTTER