

The Galleries

La Cienega Area



Manny Silverman launches what they used to call a hazard of new fortunes in a La Cienega Boulevard space that has previously housed the Terry DeLapp and Ulrike Kantor galleries, among others. Silverman is familiar to art folks as a stalwart of Art Services, the Melrose Avenue framers and all-around support operation. His gallery starts promisingly with small paintings and works on paper made by Sam Francis in the early '60s.

At 65, Francis is, of course, among L.A.'s handful of international art luminaries-in-residence and the only one whose credentials stretch back to the glory days of

Abstract Expressionism. The 22 works on view in this relatively modest space can only suggest the breadth of his grasp, but they do reveal the consistent quality of his improvisation.

Like a master of Zen or jazz, Francis never seems to be out to accomplish anything in particular other than to grasp a sense of the moment. The work is meaty, spontaneous and hard to write about because it doesn't organize itself on literary or rational lines. It has several main spatial themes: Splashy shapes flee toward the canvas edge, opening the middle, while globular balloons and confetti splashes float upward through

the space or crash into the center like a four-way collision at an intersection.

Francis plays a happy, decorative tune but he does so with an intensity that edges everything with a bracing anxiety. The gesture is a trifle overweight and sleepy but it keeps a careful eye on itself. It's like the Zen parable of the cat who won't catch the mouse if he falls asleep any more than he'll catch it if he's too tense. Francis usually catches the mouse. (Manny Silverman Gallery, 800 N. La Cienega Blvd., to Dec. 14.)

—W.W.