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Valerie Hegarty: 'Cosmic Collisions'

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Valerie Hegarty, *Starry Rothko*, 2010
Courtesy Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

In Ms. Hegarty's first solo at Nicelle Beauchene, the damage is more neatly contained. Facsimiles of famous artworks by Mark Rothko, Sol LeWitt and others have been altered beyond recognition, but the space around them hasn't been touched.

Some of Ms. Hegarty's transformations suggest natural disasters; others conjure nuclear explosions or ruptures in the space-time continuum. The peaks and valleys of "Starry Rothko," which evokes relief sculptures by Lee Bontecou and Lynda Benglis, hint at all three. Sometimes she subjects the same image to multiple undoings, producing both stretched-out and compacted versions of Frederic Edwin Church's "Twilight in the Wilderness." (You have to wonder what she would do with Man Ray's "Indestructible Object.")

The problem with trying to make a destroyed Rothko or Church, though, is that first you have to make a convincing Rothko or Church. Here, Ms. Hegarty falls short; her "masterworks" look too much like props, even after repeated violations. "Pollock's Flying Carpet," for instance, reminds you that faking an action-painting isn't as easy as you might think.

Ms. Hegarty's desire to strip certain artworks of their mystery and sanctity conveys a winning insouciance. But she's much better at chipping away layers of the gallery than she is at making objects to be destroyed.

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