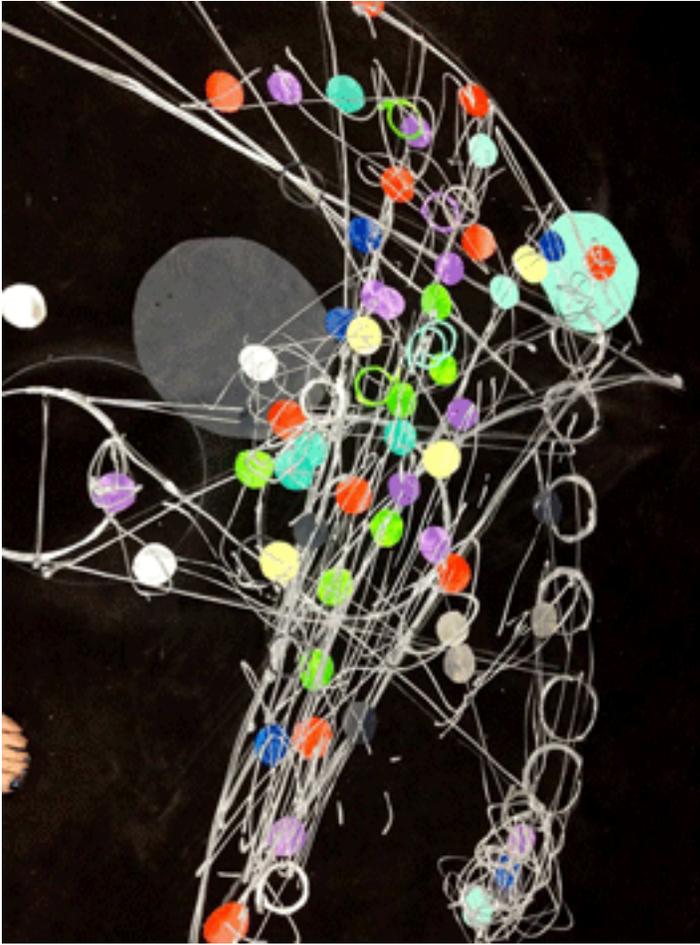


Layers in motion

Judy Rifka polished off her installation of works past and present by rehanging her latest and close to largest. Collapsing gridded cones and cylinders appear to spiral across a field of pure black. Magnetic fields? A fantasy of computer-assisted design? Nope, just the remembered shapes of things on the street, rendered in paint. In the process, they become layered, transformed, and set in motion.

Rifka insists on layering and motion as a constant in work of more than forty years. It is consistently slippery, between two and three dimensions, subject matter and composition, image and object. If you have an association with the painting, you are likely to be wrong. Perhaps her most spare and painterly bear the title *A History of Sculpture*. Another painting began as a structural analysis after **Leonardo**, another resembles a puppet show, and some from the 1970s began as **an alphabet**, but never mind. These are first and foremost abstractions.

Some of the earliest work incorporates text, but even then as a layer and with reference to performance, like *dog show* or *danceterian*. After that, what looks like collage is likely to be the sheer accumulation of acrylic. Individual brushstrokes remain visible in undifferentiated fields of red, black, or white on otherwise unpainted panels.



And what look like accents of color on black prove a variation on collage, but without mixed media. These are circles of canvas, held down on unstretched canvas only by long drips of paint, and some are already starting to peel off.

Of course, motion is not everyone's idea of consistency, and Rifka has started over many a time. Like **Frank Stella**, she thinks in series, and she has suffered for it. It did not entirely fit with the demand for rigor when she began, and it does not entirely fit in with today's demand for that elusive brand name. She showed at Gracie Mansion, perhaps the epitome of **East Village art** back then, but more steadily and often at Soho's classier Brooke Alexander. She appeared in a couple of Whitney Biennials in the 1970s and 1980s, but also in a legendary clash of art and counterculture, the 1980 Times Square Show. In between, she never quite got the message that **painting is**

dead, and neither did I.

The curator, Gregory de la Haba, is still making discoveries as he plunges through her archives, and works rotate in and out through the course of the show. Rifka shares The Yard, an office and conference center, with Jay Milder. Born in 1934, Milder has been very much consistent in style, but just as much out of the public eye. He uses thicker brushstrokes against black, like **Abstract Expressionism** as **street art**. The space turns out to work splendidly for art, even with a pile of pizza boxes from the previous day's conferencing, with both quiet alcoves and long vistas. It allows Rifka's series to hang largely apart.

Like most painters willing to take chances, she has had her share of false starts. I first met her holding a cuddly 3D painting, from the series *In the Round*, like the world's largest and airiest paperweight, and others not in the show can be too busy. The series soar when they achieve a logic and focus of their own. In earlier work on both canvas and cut paper, fields of gray verge on tan and tan on gray. More recently, the colored circles nestle amid silvery white traces, like particle tracks or macromolecules, but then (oops) I said to forget the associations. Stick to their lean motion against uninterrupted black.