

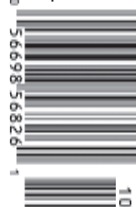
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The Fetishism of the Book Object

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how it was done

PYRO-TECHNICALLY YOURS

Rosemarie Fiore draws with fireworks

by Lilly Wei

These days, Rosemarie Fiore wears a gas mask and heavy gloves when she works. Enveloped by sulfurous clouds from live fireworks, she resembles a latter-day magus casting spells. The idea of using the volatile medium first came to Fiore in 2001—on the Fourth of July, while at a residency in Roswell, New Mexico—when she looked at the perfect line of dots created on the cement floor by a smoke bomb that she had accidentally dropped. Long fascinated with chance and automatism, she



Firework Drawing #25, lit firework residue on Fabriano paper (54 3/4 x 41 in.), 2009. All images courtesy Priska C. Juschka Fine Art, New York

vowed on the spot to learn to “draw” with fireworks.

Despite her allegiance to chance, Fiore reserves the right of artistic control in her newest series “Firework Drawings” (2008–9), which she describes as a collaboration between herself and the explosives. Using fireworks was so unpredictable and violent, she says, that it took her a long time to “figure out how to make something with them.” This series—her most complex, densely layered, and opulently colored firework drawings to date—are collages as much as they are drawings, melding the edited with the



unpremeditated. They bring to mind Hubble skylines, psychedelic art, and the cindered aftermath of festivals; you can almost smell the tang of gunpowder.

Unconventional means of making art is Fiore’s specialty. Amusement park rides and pinball machines have both figured in past projects, primarily because these commonplace forms of popular entertainment were familiar. (The artist enjoyed going to arcades as a child and says that she rides the Coney Island Cyclone on bad days to clear her

head.) For the “Scrambler Drawings” series (2004)—a kind of super-size example of spin art—Fiore equipped the popular ride with buckets of paint. When it was activated, the spinning motion dropped immense loops of color on to the vinyl tarps spread beneath, circles swirling within circles. For “Evel Knievel Pinball Paintings” (2002), she coated the balls from a pinball machine with oil paint; they scribbled and splattered a record of the games she racked up on a playboard fitted with velum. Like the firework drawings, these works



Opposite and above: Rosemarie Fiore working in her backyard. Photos by Michael Ferris, Jr.

depend on a time-based, mechanical means of production that results in a lobbed-on composition that can't be entirely predetermined.

Fiore's parents both grew up in the Bronx and she lives there today. Working in her backyard, she lays out several attached sheets of heavy-weight Fabriano paper, the dimensions of the largest supports nearing seven feet, then explodes a selection of fireworks over the paper. Her arsenal includes spinning carnations, monster balls, magic whips, rings of fire, and jumping jacks. Colored powder leaches into the support like nuclear fallout, leaving outlines of discarded fuses and matches and scarring the paper's surface with feathery burn marks. The process is a kind of choreography that Fiore finds intoxicating. "It's like a high in ten minutes that jolts your mind out of all the nonsense, that shuts out the world and brings you into the creative state quickly," she says.

When the action comes to a standstill, when Fiore feels nothing more is happening, she takes the work back into her studio and studies it, placing circles of white paper or circular cutouts from previously exposed paper on to sections she wants to block out. Sometimes the circles are stacked to create a low relief; sometimes they're spilled across the surface like a toppled pile of coins. Fiore then takes the work in progress outdoors again, placing explosives in containers and carefully positioning the containers above the newly added circles. She might strap a few smoke fountains to a long pole and light them, using the jerry-rigged device to draw, say, an array of fine, wavered green lines on the drawing in progress, or she might drag the smoke fountains directly across the surface of the paper. She improvises, altering and fine-tuning elements of

the composition again and again. It's a slow process, and it often takes her up to six weeks to complete a single piece.

The circumference of the colored circle created by a live firework and the intensity of its hue vary depending upon the type of explosive, the type of container used to control the fallout from the explosion (buckets, cans, glass jars, and cardboard cylinders have all been employed), the length of time the container is inverted, and the amount of force Fiore exerts on the inverted container. Weather and atmospheric conditions also affect color. Yellows are more lemony in summer and more ochre in winter, pinks are more vibrant in the summer. Fiore prefers to work during the winter months—and at night, reveling in the fireworks' dazzle. One of the darkest, sultriest works, *Firework Drawing #25*, was made in early 2009, its lush chocolate reds and velvety maroons accented by rosy pinks, pale green, and gleams of yellow, the matte areas offset by glimmering sections of translucence, and a single little pool of bright green just off-center that might be a cosmic traffic light signaling "Go."

Serious spectacle with a whiff of sci-fi noir, Rosemarie Fiore's "Firework Drawings" are private rites of exorcism in which quirky pop sensibilities mingle with the apocalyptic. They conjure a trippy cosmos—suns, moons, and comets streak across a fiery sky. Her process might seem overly elaborate, but for the pyrophilic Fiore, drawing wild-style is an engrossing, exhilarating alternative to more pedestrian means of artmaking.

Opposite: *Firework Drawing #9*,
lit firework residue on Fabriano paper
[82 1/2 x 66 3/4 in.], 2009

