

## Connie Fox at Danese/Corey

The shore of Gardiners Bay on the east end of Long Island is, nominally, the theme of “Sammy’s Beach,” 2007–, a series of acrylic paintings by Connie Fox. Thirteen such works were on view in this exhibition, accompanied by five charcoal drawings from the series “Weeds,” 2010. The two groups



Connie Fox, *Sammy’s Beach VIII*, 2010  
acrylic on canvas, 73 x 78”.

comprise gestural abstractions distinguished by compulsiveness and distress, and all are marked by an interplay—invariably dramatic, often violent—of black and white.

The “Sammy’s Beach” works are large, and typically have a strong central area, usually marked by an emphatic shape or shapes. Diamonds appear in *Sammy’s Beach I*, 2007; the luminous moon (striated with gestures) in *Sammy’s Beach III*, 2007; a sort of dead bush or brambles (rendered as a dense black flurry of brushstrokes) in the center of *Sammy’s Beach X*, 2012. In many of these cases, Fox punctuates her lush mark-making with severely flat planes. *Sammy’s Beach XIII*, 2013, for instance, features two blue squares behind a vortex-like flower, and the more or less rigid geometry contrasts vividly with the roiling paint.

In *Sammy’s Beach VIII*, 2010, the sharp lines of a grid incise a blue field that must be a sky. *Sammy’s Beach IV*, 2009, is itself an off-

kilter grid—the entire composition consists of variously shaped boxes fitted together, with blue blocks (signifying water) on the bottom half and orange and silver blocks (signifying sky) on the top. The related acrylic-on-paper series “Sammy’s Beach B&W,” 2010—not on view but reproduced in the show’s catalogue—push this tendency even further. In those works, gestural churning has been replaced by a relatively systematic (and fully nonrepresentational) order. Layer upon layer of variously sized rectangular modules, alternately black and white, are awkwardly fitted together like raw bricks in a sort of wailing wall of a grid.

Born in 1925, Fox began the “Sammy’s Beach” acrylic paintings in the eighth decade of her life. Their energy and assertiveness, their sheer instinctiveness, their interplay of warring impulses—Eros and Thanatos, one might speculate—are remarkable. In the “Sammy’s Beach B&W” works, geometric patterning appears to structure the expression of these drives. The grid keeps the life-symbolizing white (light) and the death-symbolizing black (darkness) from integrating; they are held in suspension. In “Weeds,” Fox produces tight, kinetic scribbles atop neat grids. Her works are themselves “weeds” that wildly flourish in defiance of death, and she finally achieves a morbid integrity in the black flower, inflected with white, that blossoms in the center of *Sammy’s Beach XIII*. The flower—a sign of the wisdom that can come with old age—appears to drink from the life-giving water of Gardiner’s Bay that Fox continues to swim in.

—Donald Kuspit

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