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Fresh, Hot and Headed for Fame



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William E. Sauro

ART

Mary Weatherford, whose boldly scaled targets and silk-screened images of peonies may be seen at the Diane Brown Gallery.

A few blocks east at the Diane Brown Gallery (560 Broadway, at Prince Street), **MARY WEATHERFORD**, a New York City artist, is showing paintings (through Jan. 27) that turn the motifs made popular by Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol toward feminist ends. The images deployed are boldly scaled targets or silk-screened images of peonies with ghosts of targets lurking among their papery petals. The contrast of military order and organic softness, of masculine and feminine, is substantiated by the paintings' titles, which are borrowed from a well-known tale of exploitation, Puccini's "Madama Butterfly." The paintings are variously named after the opera's heroine, her child and Nagasaki, the port where the opera takes place.

Ms. Weatherford's titles and the tragedy they evoke don't take her art as far beyond Johns and Warhol as they need to go, but her sense of color, especially in the two largest target paintings, is unusual and promising. Moreover, her determination to turn abstract painting into a crossover art form, infusing it with both feminist consciousness and references to the performing arts that are fraught with feminine stereotypes, is full of possibilities.