

Art

José Lerma, “I am sorry I am Perry”

Lerma’s works are as delightful as they are opaque. *By Joseph R. Wolin*



★★★★☆
Critic's Rating

[Andrea Rosen Gallery](#),
through Sat 22

Samuel Bernard

Photographs: Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery

In José Lerma’s compact exhibition, squiggly blue lines that look like ballpoint-pen doodles form twin columns of piled spirals, rising up on either side of John Law, a large unprimed canvas on beveled stretchers. The spirals resemble stacked cinnamon buns or the curly locks of a Louis XIV–style wig, like the one worn by the 18th-century Scottish economist of the painting’s title. Yet, instead of a face, swaths and blobs of thick paint—actually colored caulk—occupy the center of the image, making it abstract—an antilikeness that shares something of David Dupuis’s graphic obsessiveness, as well as Carrol Dunham’s cartoonish representation.

In *The Glib Decade*, the artist attaches a similar image on a small canvas to a larger, all-over, Twomblyesque composition of blue and pink scribbles punctuated by a few impasto daubs. Each of the bottom corners of the latter rest on the keys of an electronic keyboard, producing continuous pulsating tones that fill the gallery. A painting that makes its own disembodied music, droning though it may be, feels sweetly goofy, and also rather sublime.

How that gesture relates to a historical figure like Law, however, remains unclear, as does his connection to *De la Nada Muerte a la Nada Vida*, a hanging curtain made of the reflective fabric used for safety stripes on bicycling gear. The piece changes from dull gray to an iridescent, almost immaterial shimmer, depending on the viewer’s position in the room. Like the curtain, Lerma’s intentions may be opaque, but their effects produce delight.