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ART IN REVIEW

Benjamin Butler

'Forest's Edge' Team 527 West 26th Street, Chelsea Through June 18

In another context, you could mistake Benjamin Butler's abstracted landscapes for banal decorative paintings made for furniture showrooms or dentists' offices. In a Chelsea gallery, they bloom like hot house flowers. Made with a brusquely sensuous touch, each depicts a few slender, mostly leafless trees with the spaces between filled in with hyper-energetic patterns: short bands of color, woozy concentric stripes or fields of small brick-like brush marks.

Color schemes include fiery orange and yellow, misty greens and confectionery pastels. Two square paintings displayed horizontally on low pedestals have myriad little dots squeezed directly from paint tubes onto green monochromes; they look just like fields of wildflowers viewed from on high.

Mr. Butler is toying like a Pop artist with conventions of early 20th-century abstraction. Mondrian's systematic abstraction of trees comes most immediately to mind. Mr. Butler may be thinking about the decline of the once revolutionary Modernist style into kitsch, and in that respect he is updating artists like Peter Halley and Sherrie Levine. But like those artists, he also revels in painting as an end in itself; so he and we get to have it both ways: we can be both knowing intellectuals and paint-loving hedonists.