

ARTNEWS

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POLLY APFELBAUM AT CLIFTON BENEVENTO

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New York

Polly Apfelbaum, "A Handweaver's Pattern Book," 2014, installation view.
ANDRES RAMIREZ/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CLIFTON BENEVENTO, NEW YORK



Polly Apfelbaum, who has been working with fabrics and dyes since the mid-1980s, has an alchemist's touch. For this exhibition, "A Handweaver's Pattern Book," she festooned most of the walls with "drawings" on synthetic velvet panels. The 50 rectangular works featured thousands of circular spots made with markers in every color imaginable.

Apfelbaum, who used punch cards as templates, arranged her round dots in square patterns. Each dot was allowed to bleed freely, and most had halos of color suggesting a palimpsest. The map-like hangings were joyous and energetic but also rigorous and obsessive. This apparent contradiction created a wonderful tension between mind and method.

Apfelbaum's arrangements, mathematical and fluid, make the eye move diagonally, vertically, and horizontally, and always quickly. Here, the dots did a

vivid polka as the diaphanous fabrics moved in the gallery air. Perhaps to slow our experience of the colorful installation and encourage meditation on the grids, Apfelbaum suspended homemade ceramic beads from plumb lines, so three-dimensional dots hung around six inches from the floor. (The artist is in the habit of gifting a bead to each visitor to her studio.) At once crafty quilts and elegant abstractions, the dyed wall hangings enveloped our senses with Apfelbaum's singular stains.