

July shows at Coral Gables galleries are worth viewing

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...taken from The Miami Herald Friday, July 2, 1982

Mario Bencomo has two signatures as an artist: his name and a squiggle. It is by the latter, the curving quirk that disturbs the sublimity of his paintings and drawings, that he is known. In a current exhibition of his most recent works at Forma Gallery, the squiggle invades the color-laden paintings, enlivening the build-up of soft-edged forms and adding a touch of gaiety to the serious business of creating a moiré-like surface.

Bencomo works hard at his surfaces, layering pigments in circular motions with the brush held upright to achieve effecting textures. Although he uses the same method, and much the same palette for both the canvas works and those on paper, the drawings are more affable for it. The rich, jewel tones are clearer, and even the imagery, minimal though it is in these purist visions of color, is strengthened.

In the two years since Bencomo's last one-artist exhibition in Miami he has continued to challenge color as a theme, a means and an end. The drawings--they are really paintings with the addition of other media--are the trophies of his mastery.

Pretto's canines

When last the Meeting Point Art Center hosted an exhibition of works by Rogelio Pretto, you needed a magnifying glass to fully appreciate his miniatures. The tiny, postage stamp to postcard-size works have grown with the group now on view, but the miniaturist's techniques are still in evidence. Taking the Chinese Year of the Dog as a theme, Pretto's most recent temperas also involve thoroughly human preoccupations, transferred, for a time, to the canine family. Allowing dogs a turn at the Rubik's Cube and Coca-Cola cans, Pretto also includes several works that focus on the antics of a creature of his own imagination, an almost-human grasshopper named Gregorio.

Exquisitely painted and seductive as only small, perfectly made paintings can be, this latest selection from the Panamanian master miniaturist will delight everyone.