

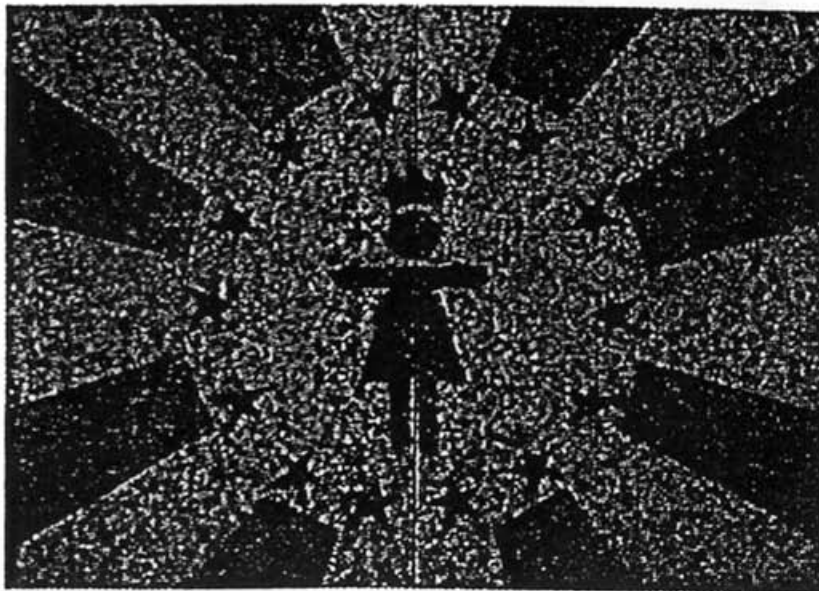
Mara de Luca**Abstruse Space** *East End*

Meaning concealed or difficult to understand, abstruse is an accurate description of this new gallery which is situated partly in the atrium of a well kept apartment block and partly in the gallerist's flat. He has a habit of fleeing the country, though, leaving his luckless flatmate to deal with visitors; and since he didn't want to let me into the flat to watch Mara de Luca's video, I had to be content with the four large paintings outside.

Precipitated by the September 11 attacks and painted in a cloudy, tactile mix of oil and encaustic, they offer a politicised twist on Jasper Johns' flag

paintings. A wallpaper-like base of floral patterning is overlaid with flag-like designs in a darker colour. In one, a repeating motif of wan red roses is sandwiched with diagonal bands of Stars-and-Stripes stars fuzzily painted in a muted version of the same red. Another painting mixes overlapping outlines of plants with a schematic figure at the centre of a starry circle. Juxtaposing the forces of nationalism and the gentility of the hearth, the conjunctions are suggestive of the outside world crashing into the drawing-room. But they add little to the welter of analysis of America's response to the attacks and, hung among graceful, cream-and-white mouldings, they convert easily into harmless décor.

Martin Herbert



July 17-24 2002 | **TIME OUT LONDON 57**

East End

FREE Abstruse Space 020 7613 2722

Studio 6, 208 Kingsland Rd, E2.

⊖ Liverpool St then bus 149 or 242. Daily 12noon-6pm.

Last chance to see **Mara De Luca**: one painting mixes overlapping outlines of plants with a schematic figure at the centre of a starry circle. Juxtaposing the forces of nationalism and the gentility of the hearth, the conjunctions are suggestive of the outside world crashing into the drawing room. (MH) ▶ July 19