

**RUSSELL MALTZ /  
LINDA LEVIT** Condeso/Lawler  
**DRAWING WITH RESPECT**  
**TO PAINTING** New York Studio  
**CATHERINE LEE** John Davis

By TIFFANY BELL

**RUSSELL MALTZ /  
LINDA LEVIT**

The concurrent shows of new paintings by Russell Maltz and Linda Levit offer an interesting comparison between two approaches in recent abstract painting. Both artists have developed their work from geometric abstractions which had used hard-edged, roughly geometric flat forms on rectangular canvas supports. Over the last several years, both artists have expanded upon the principles of geometric abstraction applied in their earlier work to incorporate greater complexity.

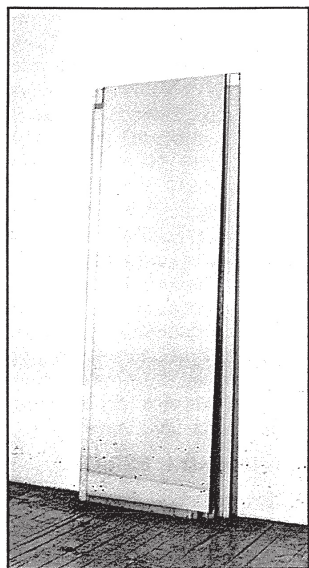
Maltz's earlier paintings were made of flat areas of a single color painted in relationship to a white field on a rectangular support. They adhered to a formalist ideology that maintained the importance of identifying the painted surface with the flatness of the canvas support. His recent paintings are based on the same thinking but his approach, which might once have been described as reductive, is now incorporating more complexity and a certain

amount of irony as well.

The exhibition includes paintings made of stacks of plate glass or wood leaning against the wall supported by either the floor or a small shelf. For the glass works, large basically rectangular pieces of glass of different sizes were collected from construction sites. Some are painted on one side while others are clear. Maltz has leaned several pieces, which are for the most part a single color, against the wall, allowing the viewer to perceive the progression of planes. As one looks through the glass, certain areas appear denser and others more translucent. This experience of depth, however, is not illusionary but the evidence of an actual build-up of planes of color and clear glass. Escaping the strict limitations imposed by maintaining flatness in his painting, Maltz has reintroduced depth without reintroducing a pictorial illusionism that derives from the reading of a painting as a window to another world.

As pointed out by William Zimmer, Maltz's use of glass originally used as windows adds a certain

Russell Maltz, *Ava*, 1984.  
Enamel on glass, four sheets, 96 x 37 1/2  
x 7". Courtesy Condeso/Lawler Gallery.



Linda Levit, *Twin Falls*, 1986. Oil on canvas,  
30 x 16". Courtesy Condeso/Lawler Gallery.



irony to his literal presentation of real space. The wood stacks do not play with illusionism in the same way. They have a heavy, matter-of-fact presence emphasized by their mundane arrangements in stacks. They are casual but curious. In these pieces especially, Maltz appears to be investigating the use of different colors within a single painting. These investigations and the use of a variety of materials suggest that Maltz's paintings will continue to develop in interesting ways.

Levit's earlier paintings were composed of several lines of color seen against a solid field. She too has developed much greater complexity in her work though her means are different. Levit continues to paint on rectangular canvases but is now incorporating many motifs of zigzagging lines, dots, curved shapes, stripes, and so on in bright, intense colors. The smooth surfaces of her earlier paintings have been abandoned in favor of textured, gestural surfaces.

Besides the range of decorative motifs, Levit's paintings also evoke many associations in an attempt to convey a variety of feeling. *Carbonado*, a dark, mostly black painting with forms reminiscent of primitive motifs, has a heavy, brooding feel. A smaller painting, *South of the Border*, though containing some of the same motifs, has pasty orange and pink colors, giving the work a more festive feel. Similarly, a painting such as *Twin Falls* has forms suggesting a landscape.

Though these associations contribute to the expressive qualities of her paintings, her work is still essentially abstract. The paintings do not represent anything specifically. Furthermore, they maintain a basically flat, frontal space retaining their identity as objects. The associations offer a way of giving new dimensions to the work and greater variety in form. (Condeso/Lawler, April 8-May 3)

**DRAWING WITH RESPECT  
TO PAINTING**

This exhibition, curated by David Reed, a teacher at the Studio School, was put together with students in mind and is intended to suggest ways in which abstract painters use drawings in their working process. The artists represented, Guy Goodwin, Elizabeth Murray, and Brice Marden, offer a variety of approaches to drawing as well as to abstraction.

The relationship of drawing to painting in Goodwin's art appears to be the most traditional. His work does include recognizable subject matter. In the four studies and large oil painting entitled *Domain* shown here, a shovel occupies the foreground of an otherwise less clearly decipherable landscape. In two charcoal studies, Goodwin seems to have worked out the composition and investigated the relationship of dark and light areas. The watercolors are color studies, both done in earth colors though one tends toward red and the other green.

The painting clearly relates to all the studies and incorporates aspects from each of them. The forms with heavy, dark outlines derive from the charcoal studies whereas the color of the painting has the range of earth tones explored in both watercolors. All of Goodwin's studies look like finished works of art and could be exhibited individually yet the oil painting is clearly primary.

Murray exhibits two kinds of drawings together with one painting. There is a set of seven sketches done on small sheets of lined notebook paper in colored pencil that are simple notations, probably not meant for exhibition. They do, however, suggest the basis for her painting *The Garage*. As opposed to Goodwin's drawings where the forms were largely determined even in the first one, Murray's sketches show a development of her images toward greater abstraction. In seeing her sketches, for example, it becomes clear that an amorphous long limbed form in the painting is a figure stepping forward and that small triangular fragments bursting apart in an area toward the right derive from the image of a broken-up chair.

The other drawing is a more formal charcoal made after the painting was finished. It is certainly not copied from the painting or the earlier sketches yet its forms are vaguely related to them. This presentation suggests that though Murray may investigate various forms in simple sketches, her paintings and more formal drawings primarily develop during the process of making the individual piece.

In thinking of Marden's art, one often tends to separate the development of his drawings from his paintings. As this exhibition shows, however, his drawing and painting are becoming more integ-