

DELAWARE ARTS CENTER GALLERY (Continued from page 2)

The Reaches of Abstraction

PAINTING EXHIBITION
CURATED BY CORINNE ROBINS
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ESSAY BY CORRINNE ROBINS

MODERN ABSTRACT ART, WITH ITS ROOTS IN THE WORKS OF KUPKA and Kandinsky, is now approximately one hundred years old. Since its inception, it has taken on many meanings until half way through the century, in the mid fifties, the pioneer abstract artist Ad Reinhardt announced "Art is art and everything else is everything else." He then confided to his students at Brooklyn College, "Too bad about your talent, I am the end of painting." The transcendence of art was no longer viable, but painting of course has continued.

More recently, the critic David Hickey wrote, "Strength is now ascribed to a work of art in terms of its bond with the artist...earlier critics exalted modernism as a virile struggle with and ultimate triumph over the effeminacy of illusionistic space." Meanwhile, today in our new century, abstract artists seem on the one hand to be finding their way back to the wall, creating a floating inward curving space—a space already hinted at in the inward works of Mark Rothko and Ad Reinhardt, and on the other hand, to be turning cubism on its head and arriving at a new language of forms.

The seven artists in this exhibition share the vocabulary of abstract art while representing seven different approaches to painting. Surface, brush stroke, image, geometric vocabulary, overall color field, the play of light and the return of illusionistic space. The word beauty, the return of the art of suggestion, is now buoyed up by secret structural underpinnings. These twenty-first century explorations of abstraction are what keep painting viable and art made by hand and eye exciting in our electronic computer driven world.

"The search for new imagery continues to be exciting," painter **BARBARA BUCKMAN** explains, referring to her six and a half foot tall painting "Glide." Buckman's delicate configurations—the play of three separate live complex shapes poised one on top of the other, each made up of interior moving parts, are so alive perhaps because, as the artist explains, "they display my thinking as clearly as possible." Three delicate, humorous fragments of drawings that play against each other offer no concrete answers even as they invite us to enter into this tripartite painting.

If drawing is the entryway into Barbara Buckman's painting, it is the speed of the brush stroke that is paramount in the paintings of **EDWARD CLARK**. An artist who came to maturity in the ambiance of American abstract expressionism, travel has been important in his life (he maintains studios in both Paris and New York) and in the coursing of his brush stroke across the canvas. The brush stroke is at once ambitious and definitive. For a long time Clark's paintings consisted of horizontal markings made by brush and push broom. The paintings then and now were inspired by landscape but not of it. Not earth and sky, but the forces of life, of push/pull are painted in his canvases. In 1988 Clark resurrected some of his abstract expressionist brush strokes and sent them spinning in paintings composed of double pairs of arches like broken color wheels behind a horizontal bar. Intensely felt sensations and movement in his paintings bespeak a climax of light or ecstasy in color.

CHARLES HINMAN's constructed paintings are made of acrylic on synthetic fabric along and over wood. His shaped painting "Ultramarine" has sailed beyond its intrinsic rectangular shape and seems to move across the wall as if it were an open field. His painting sets up a visual dialogue between the real space of the three dimensional and the illusionary space created by the artist's overlapping planes. In the painting in this exhibition, the deep blue brushy surface of "Ultramarine" is lifted and set afloat by its overlapping planes of gray and yellow.

The late **ANDY JANSONS**, like Edward Clark, came to maturity beneath the shadow of abstract expressionism. Jansons came to America as a refugee after the Second World War, and by the eighties worked in a very different mode from the earlier American painters. He worked from studies and drawings, drawing as much upon the structure of Cubism as on the stylistic brush stroke of abstract expressionism. In his painting "Threshold," the brush strokes become ribbons of color suggesting a mysterious structure suspended in and growing out of a blue ground.

TED KURAHARA's "Double Graphite Over Cadmium Red Medium Tint" consists of two panels with an interior geometry expressed through many layers of color. Color, the artist says, creates the image. Critic Jerome Sans writes "Kurahara's resolute minimalism is rendered more forceful by the stark geometry of his painting." As in most of Ted Kurahara's work, the image is the division or structure of his color—in this instance, graphite over cadmium red that is at once light and presence.

LINDA LEVIT's geometric painting "Reason" is that contradictory thing—a black and white painting alive with color. Made up of contrasting grids, a wall of brick forms an illogical arrangement of black squares and rectangles which like dominos move across a white

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field which in turn is superimposed upon a yellow ground. "Reason" is a study in movement and stillness, stillness and shifting balance.

JOAN VENNUM's tondo

"Before" creates an inward curving space on which her web of marks rise and recede, and the painting hangs like a far away body...green, yellow and blue tracings journeying upward to the palest tones as an invisible light seems to bend the canvas. Like Levit, Vennum works in oil. Her brush stroke focusing on ideas of equilibrium, the painter's marks suggest a kind of vibration of a vast body afloat in the universe. And always there is the mystery of the inner moving light that holds the surface together even as the canvas tilts upward.

CORINNE ROBINS, curator, critic and poet, has curated over a dozen exhibitions, including *Women and Wood* at the Katonah Art Museum and *Outrageous Women* at the Aljira Gallery in New Jersey. She has published numerous articles on art in *Art in America*, *Arts Magazine*, *American Book Review*, and *New York Times Sunday Book Review*. She is the author of *THE PLURALIST ERA: American Art 1968-81* (Harper Collins 1985), and her most recent collection of art poems is *MARBLE GODDESSES WITH TECHNICOLOR SKINS* (Segue Books 1990). She teaches art history at the School of Visual Arts and art criticism at Pratt Institute in New York City.