

David Row at Von Lintel

Art in America, Feb, 2007 by Lilly Wei

The nine luminous new paintings (all from 2006) in this show by David Row, a much respected New York-based abstract painter, have shifted from the analytic approach he previously favored to a more immediate engagement with the expressive, even lyrical qualities of paint and process. In the 1980s and 1990s, in an effort to revitalize nonrepresentational painting, he, as well as several other artists--Stephen Ellis, Valerie Jaudon, David Reed and Shirley Kaneda, to name a few--focused on the formal language of painting to create what was sometimes referred to as syntactical or conceptual abstraction.

Now it seems that Row has come full circle. His signature paintings of alkyd and oil with their calculated technical devices--the scraping, the sanding, the paired canvases--and bold, handsome shapes and colors, have given way to works in oil that seem more integrally the result of his painting process. They are scaled to the body, averaging around 5 by 6 feet, and are surprisingly lovely. I say surprisingly because reproductions--which we often see before the original--cannot capture their delicate sheen or the nuances of their hues. With the exception of Cubist Blues, each painting consists of broad, loosely interlaced loops, bringing to mind post-monochrome Brice Marden paintings crossed with late de Koonings. Cubist Blues, on the other hand, pictures a transparent cube in a state of flux, either multiplying or consolidating, outlined by fibrillating deep-indigo lines.

The colors are muted, silvery reds, blues or greens, and even when most vivid--the untitled bright orange painting, say--they are veiled by paler, sometimes whitened interwoven bands that read as the aura or shadow of the stronger color. These paintings have the diaphanous spontaneity of watercolors--although still fretted and scraped--and the drips and splatters that shower the surface add to the sensation of balletic, buoyant motion. But it is their fragile, shivered light that makes them unforgettable. This radiance suffuses each painting, an understated but gripping phenomenon, and while the paintings are made up of more than one color, the colors are so close in value that the sensation is often that of the monochrome. The reticent Pastorage, a fresh green-gold, and Slipped Glimpse, frosty white shading into arctic blue, are the two great beauties here, while Venus Type, a bitter burnt orange, is more clamorous. This is David Row in a new, more subtle and contemplative mode, one in which the "demons" (also the title of one of the paintings) of the conceptual have been subdued for the moment by the exhilaration of simply painting.

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