

David Reed at Max Protetch

Whether David Reed, now in his fourth decade as a painter, is refining his exquisite visual vocabulary or merely spinning his wheels was the hot topic raised by his recent solo show.

Undeniably beguiling, the unmistakable look of his paintings hinges on a slithering, coiling stroke made not with a brush but with a broad palette knife, which kicks up a tiny ridge of body color alongside the glazey scrape: reflected light abuts refracted light. The techno appearance of the resulting optical blending of



David Reed: #520, 2004, oil and alkyd on linen, 44 by 176 inches; at Max Protetch.

hues has been widely commented on. In seven major new paintings, the strokes look like enormous lengths of fire hose, flattened from disuse.

In three of the works, a significant amount of the canvas has been painted a husky, unmodulated color, isolating the chromatic action, as in #514 (126 by 54 inches, 2004; all paintings oil and alkyd on linen). Slightly below center, a knot of hot, slimy red and swirling, ethereal manganese blue, layered against broad vertical stripes in pastel hues, is encapsulated in a bumpy bubble on a wine-red ground. The colors grapple like wrestlers in a Bacon bedroom painting—and go nowhere. More successful is #520 (44 by 176 inches, 2004), its fat crimson brushmarks tumbling across a crammed field of choppy splashes in a dull blue-green, overwiped with thinned ultramarine. The red daubs are reiterated in enclosing membranes scraped pink, which turn the ground blue-purple and make the opaque green blobs really pop. Each color's heft is just enough to keep the picture unlocked and adrift.

But in #477-2 (32 by 144 inches, 2001-04), ground invades figure. Along a horizontal just above center, four or five lumpy cutouts in a matte magenta field are shifted out of alignment, revealing broad squiggles of turquoise and pale viridian. Slatherings of cobalt blue glow darkly, turning the magenta inky and the pink underpainting an electric prune. The painting has been reworked after being exhibited a few years ago, and its matrix of marks resists swift decoding.

Reed's interest in film is well known and is evident in his use of attenuated formats mimicking Cinemascope. For the viewer, attempting to determine how the motifs were assembled introduces a narrative element. Storied, too, is the artist's effort to find relevance to abstract painting in the Italian Baroque. Other texts have placed Reed's work in the context of ornament, or the erotic.

Five talky, diagrammatic drawings relating directly to the larger works accompanied the show; indicating "splatter coat" and "knife marks," they confirmed that the paintings are essentially a series of surface treatments. Shaped by procedure, they resemble clinical studies, with hardly a milliliter of pigment out of place. Highly ritualized pictorial constructions, these elegant, stylish surfaces are to gut emotion as a boxing match is to a street fight.

—Stephen Maine

Judie Bamber at Gorney Bravin + Lee

How closely should we scrutinize for allegorical content a group of 11 views of an ever-changing, nearly featureless ocean vista, simplified to abstraction, by a loud-and-proud feminist heretofore known for her challenging, personal subject matter? The work in Los Angeles-based Judie Bamber's seventh solo show may be sublimated emblems of unencumbered female sexuality or meditations on the universal mother or simply explorations of a rudimentary formal structure through which to display her hard-earned virtuosity.

The paintings themselves are beautiful, and a little hallucinatory. Simultaneously realistic and abstract, eight feature a more or less distinct horizon line, and the eye reads those canvasses up and down from that central, anchoring axis. *July 18, 2002 8:30 PM* (all paintings oil on canvas stretched over panel, 30 by 36 inches, 2004) is built around the meeting of a dense blue-green-gray, which lightens considerably as it shifts downward to the painting's bottom edge, and a dusty pale lilac rising through bands of looming gray-pinks at the top. As if seen through a haze, the clammy gray at the midsection of *July 30, 2002 8:15 PM* settles into a warmer, less dense gray, while in the upper half, restrained violet gives way to a faint pink blush. Elsewhere, naturalistic detail is

summoned by the merest of means. Slight streaks describe swelling waves; a barely perceptible bunching of pigment indicates hazy clouds. Bamber often tweaks the color relationships at the horizon, as in *January 26, 2002 5:30 PM*, where inky blue ocean and radiant, dusty pink and greenish-yellow sky are cleft by a thin, hot glow.

In the three paintings where the horizon is obscured, we scan for it anyway. Its absence emphasizes surface, the creamy, glossy skin of paint brushed wet-into-wet, with repetitive horizontal strokes that are nevertheless sensual, not mechanical or rote. The upper section of *April 1, 2002 2:30 PM*, a gauzy blue-white, darkens through a ghostly transitional area before sinking into a chalky, slightly denser blue-gray with a suggestion of green along the bottom. It is a membrane of light, a faithful rendering of enveloping fog, both the most abstract and the most realistic painting in the show.

In their extreme reductionism and startling clarity, the paintings might be the flipside of photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto's atmospheric, minimalist views of sea

Judie Bamber: *July 18, 2002 8:30 PM, 2004* at Gorney Bravin + Lee.