

Warren Isensee

Danese

This midcareer painter's previous solo show here, in 2006, was widely noted for its marriage of effulgent color and workmanlike, featureless surfaces. Isensee has further refined his vocabulary of shapes and broadened his chromatic repertoire. He subdivides his canvases into adjacent rectangles featuring concentric bands and rounded corners. Sometimes, following a particular painting's structural logic, these nested, blunted boxes are elaborated into interlocking L, U and P shapes, or distilled to stripes. The architectural rigor of the design is the perfect foil for Isensee's palette, a radiant selection of rich, mellow hues, which, whether neutralized or saturated, are unremittingly seductive.

These paintings dazzle the retina, in the Op tradition. In an interview published in the exhibition catalogue, the artist, who was born in 1956, denies that his attractive coral pinks, fulsome burnt oranges, redolent greens and limpid blues refer to consumerist nostalgia for the look of housewares and home furnishings popular during his youth. In any case, the show's seven oils (all but one dated 2007) and eight preparatory drawings in colored pencil promise the viewer a Gene Davis-style sauna and massage rather than a Bridget Riley-like workout.

The 4-by-6-foot *Bipolar Express* is divided horizontally into two distinct chromatic envi-



View of John Chamberlain's exhibition "Recent Work," 2008, showing three stainless-steel sculptures; at PaceWildenstein.

ronments. The striped slab of the upper, slightly larger section is wintry overall, so even the yellows look brittle, not sunny; the lower, Mediterranean part hinges on terra-cotta, azure and cobalt blue. Above and below, the prominent whites are perfumed accordingly. In the sometimes emotionally remote idiom of geometric abstraction, such chromatic dexterity makes for a whole lot of drama.

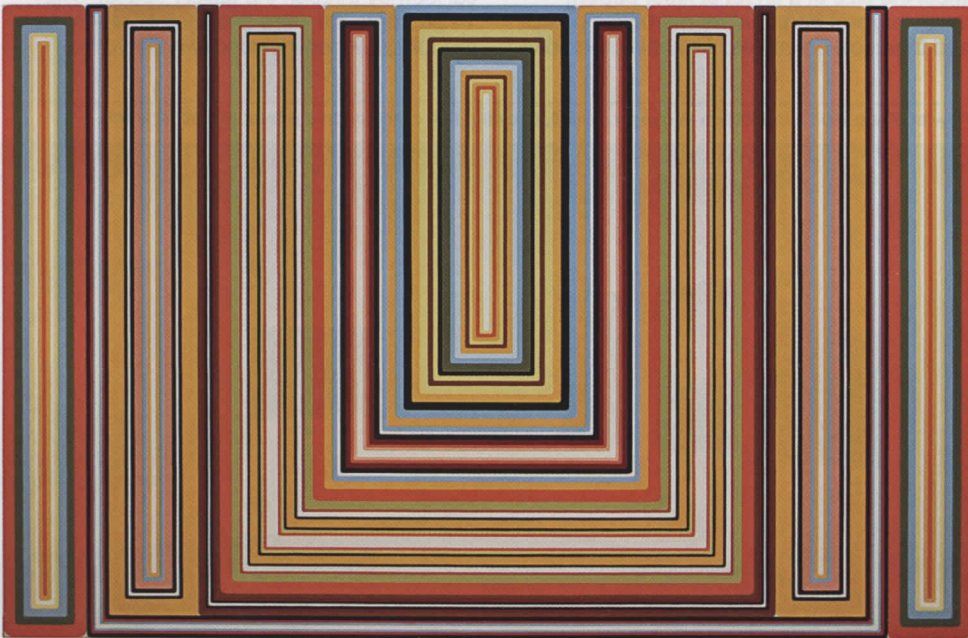
A slightly ominous edge creeps into some of these canvases, a welcome development. The liberal application of a range of blacks and very dark hues such as maroon and steel gray contributes to this effect by sobering up the palette's giddier tendencies. The chromatic range of the smaller, janglier canvases such as *To the Edge* and *High Beam* is stabilized by no-nonsense black and white bands.

New Construction, 5 feet square, possesses a futuristic grandeur. Vibrant saffron, pumpkin and cerulean provide the charm; a

symmetrical disposition of design features suggests the blank-eyed face of an enormous robot. Isensee puts these contradictions together brilliantly in the show's 6-by-10-foot centerpiece, *Body and Soul*, in which his coloristic and compositional impulses turn airless, oppressive and a bit threatening. Glowing bars frame a vertical panel beckoning from the top center. Toying with the illusion of perspective, the painting suggests both containment and endless expansion, like a corridor paneled with mirrors. There emerges a certain domesticated authoritarianism: a prison or monastery cell decorated by Russel Wright. Unlike his equally meticulous contemporary Linda Besemer, who confronts the beholder with perceptually inarguable yet spectacularly impersonal optical phenomena, Isensee draws the viewer into an enchanting chromatic dimension that promises to be purely visual. Then he slams the door behind.

—Stephen Maine

Warren Isensee: *Body and Soul*, 2007, oil on canvas, 78 by 120 inches; at Danese.



John Chamberlain

PaceWildenstein

John Chamberlain's latest show at PaceWildenstein was such a tour de force, I've been wondering if the 81-year-old sculptor isn't the Rodney Dangerfield of the art world. Does Chamberlain get the respect he merits? Sure, he's been feted at benefit dinners and has received all sorts of awards. Yet Chamberlain, it seems to me, should occupy a more illustrious niche. After all, it's hard to name another American sculptor who has mounted as many exhibitions over a period of 50 years—yes, count them—with work so consistently inventive and profound in terms of both form and materials. His oeuvre is filled with both grand gestures and small pleasures.

The five stainless-steel sculptures in Chamberlain's recent show, one from 2007 and the rest 2008, radiated reflected light. Crinkled and crimped, these works, four roughly circular and one tall and slender, their