

REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS



View of Marcia Hafif's exhibition "Glaze Paintings," 2005; at Baumgartner.

NEW YORK

Marcia Hafif at Baumgartner

Since her involvement with the Radical Painting group of the late 1970s and early '80s (which included Joseph Marioni and Olivier Mosset, among others), Marcia Hafif has been concerned with the possibilities of monochrome painting. The genre calls attention to basics: materials, format, application. In her "Glaze Paintings," which she has been making intermittently for some years, Hafif complicates and enlivens the sometimes dreary austerity of monochrome by an unlikely courtship of the sensuousness that is usually considered its opposite. Her straightforward procedure is to apply a pair of unmodulated layers of differently colored glazes—using paint straight from the tube thinned to translucence with the addition of medium—over a thickly brushed, bright white ground. The depth and clarity of the commercial colors are preserved, while the light strikes the eye in a range of volumes, sometimes thumping and sonorous, sometimes whispering and ambiguous. *Glaze Painting: Flesh Tint/Indian Yellow* approximates a pale reddish ocher, upfront and firmly holding its ground; *Glaze Painting: Indian Yellow/Rose Madder* is incandescent, a window onto a fathomless void.

Disembodied slabs of color with no referent but the paint manufacturer's color chart, these 12 works are mostly from 2005 and measure 16 by 20 inches, though two, both 2004, are 18 inches square. The stretchers are of a uniform thickness—about an inch—and the untouched white canvas around their edges attests to the controlled, empirical nature of the project. *Glaze Painting: Cobalt Violet/Manganese Blue* is among those distinguished by slightly denser pigment around the perimeter, where the brush meets increasing resistance as the taut canvas approaches the stretcher. Something in the work's matter-of-fact fabrication calls to mind Duchamp's quip that, as tubes of paint are readymades, any painting at all thus qualifies as an "assisted readymade"; certainly Hafif's painting is more "retinal" than the Dada master would countenance.

The more chromatically neutral of the paintings are particularly sensitive to the viewer's position. In *Glaze Painting: Flesh Tint/Cerulean Blue*, the slightly variegated density of blue glaze allows the warm underpainting to bloom through, looking stormy, even atmospheric, from a few paces away. On the wall opposite was its inverse, *Glaze Painting: Cerulean Blue/Flesh Tint*. When viewed head-on, the resulting gray approximates that of the gallery's concrete floor; from an angle, the relative prominence of the top glaze imparts

a distinctly ruddy shimmer.

The horizontal format is a departure for the artist; hung at generous intervals, the paintings promoted a sweeping glance of the room, a scanning movement that was arrested by the two 18-inch-square paintings hung near the desk. The metallic pigment in one of these, *Glaze Painting: Sap Green/Gold* (2004), is alien to the orthodox palette, but the painting maintains its equilibrium, simultaneously veiled and ingenuous.

—Stephen Maine

Shirley Jaffe at Tibor de Nagy

Despite her long sojourn in Paris and the evident influence of Léger and Matisse on her abstract paintings, Shirley Jaffe can still be counted as an American painter, if only for her straightforward approach to form, color and structure. Her palette has an affinity to the lively colors that Al Held used in his early '60s paintings, while she composes her pictures the way the sculptor George Sugarman organized his assortment of brightly painted, idiosyncratic wood forms of the same period.

Among the standouts in this show of 12 paintings completed in the last three years was *The Big Top* (2005). In the upper section of this 85-by-58-inch picture, a blue squiggly line dances from edge to edge across three large planes of color painted, respectively, orange, green and pink. Beneath this, compressed between a broad gray "V" and a bright red arc that cuts across the lower right corner of the painting, is an assortment of awkwardly shaped hard-edge forms offset by linear elements. As the forms jostle one another physically and optically, a kind of abstract narrative unfolds, suggesting that this is, indeed, a picture of a circus.

In the similarly sized *Champ de Mars* (2004), a large brown arc broken into irregularly