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—Eleanor Heartney

Joseph Marioni at Peter Blum

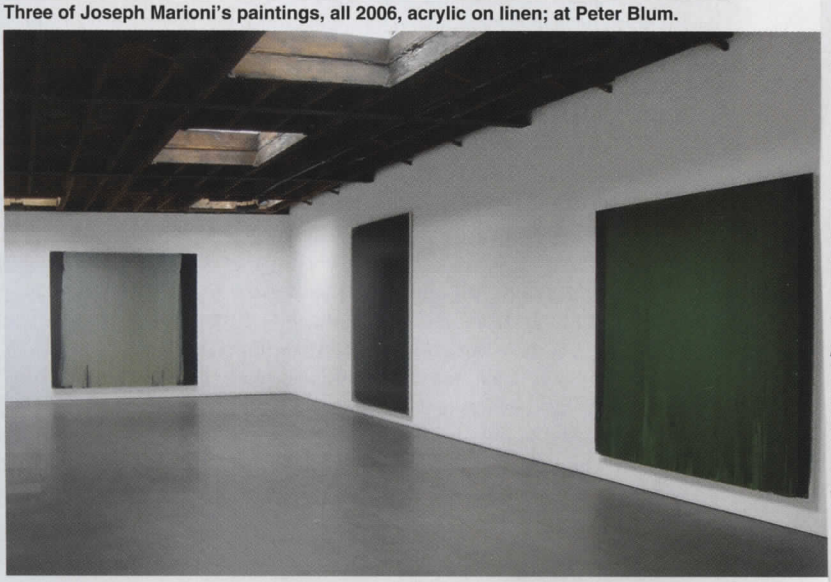
With five hulking, dour paintings, each billed as "Painting, 2006" and "acrylic and linen on stretcher," Joseph Marioni somberly inaugurated Peter Blum Chelsea. As he has for decades, the artist (or "The Painter," as he identifies himself) applies three or four coats of color to a canvas with a roller that he wields without a trace of irony. The paintings are bigger, and the paint looser, than before, and now the top layer is typically thinned to a glaze, a film through which the penultimate application is filtered. The tug of gravity allies Marioni with Morris Louis, Norman Bluhm, even Paul Jenkins, but rather than imparting a sense of weightlessness to the paintings, the tradesmanlike facture and glossy surfaces emphasize the works' massiveness.

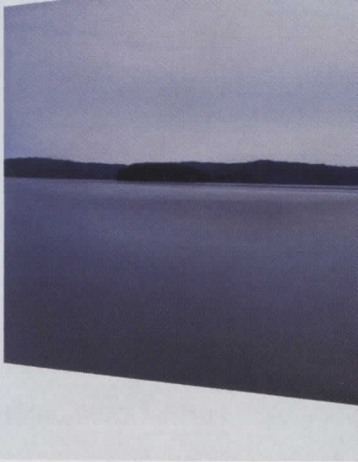
On the gallery's rear wall was one of three horizontal paintings in which darker margins, a layer or two beneath the final "skin," flank a central, contrasting section. Weighty eggplant-color bands bookend the dominant expanse—smoggy, vaguely vegetal—formed by a terre verte glaze rolled out over a pale, sugary violet. The earth green is stretched thin toward the top of this 10-by-11-foot work, where little fissures in the membrane, like runs in a nylon stocking, reveal the underlying violet. The gradual, top-to-bottom shift in density is insignificant at close range but distinct from a dozen yards distant. The viewer is grateful for these more subtle visual incidents, for there true drama lurks, not in the histrionics of cascading pigment, or the quest, now a bit dated, for a Greenbergian fusion of paint and support.

There was also a tall, dark painting and a smaller, pale one. The vagaries of the dark painting's ragged, 11-by-10-foot surface reveal undercoats of orange and green, but in aggregate the palette yields a light-sucking reddish-black, hot and roiling. At nearly 7 feet square, the smallest painting's scrimlike, near-white top coat muffles underlying chiffon yellow and mossy green, and mimics the light-filtering effect of the frosted-glass window next to which it was positioned.

The conspicuous absence of artificial illumination in the gallery, which sports four large skylights, struck a sanctimonious note. To be sure, these paintings are primarily concerned with the unadulterated apprehension of color, and lighting them so as to avoid chromatic distortions—"visual pollution," in Marioni's phrase—is critical. But visitors on a dark day were out of luck. (In fairness, I should note that Marioni offered to turn on the lights for me. I declined, and returned when the weather improved.)

Three of Joseph Marioni's paintings, all 2006, acrylic on linen; at Peter Blum.





Peter Rostovsky: *Landscape for Another* at The Project.

Though these paintings are not properly monochrome (nor polychrome: Barbara Rose's "plurichrome" hits home), they dispense, as do monochrome paintings, with figure/ground relationships. But whereas in monochrome (and other manifestations of the "abstract sublime") the picture plane is read as all ground and no figure, these, in their relentless edge-to-edge forward pressure, come at you all at once: all figure. They commandeer the neutral white wall as ground. A cradle that locates each canvas a few inches forward of the wall heightens this effect. And the work's resulting deference to the gallery's architecture, even more than its humorlessness, is its greatest liability.

—Stephen Maine

Peter Rostovsky at The Project

Over the past five years or so, Peter Rostovsky has produced "Epiphanies," an ironic, narrative-oriented series of works consisting of small, sculpted polymer-clay figures on pedestals facing wall-hung landscape paintings. In this recent exhibition, he included a single example, *Epiphany Model: The Photographer* (2006), whose eponymous, freestanding subject is dwarfed by a luminous oil-on-linen, 88-by-42-inch landscape depicting bands of mountains receding in the distance. The 6-inch-tall Sculpey figure holds his camera in the

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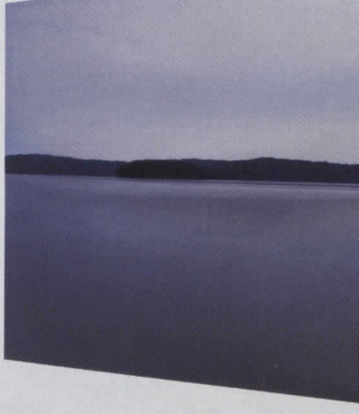

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