

AT THE GALLERIES

## Seven abstractionists for summer

BOBBIE ALLEN

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When I viewed the new show "Summer Abstraction" at Peter Blake last week, the paintings were leaning up against the walls, still partially in crates. There was an air of agony about the gallery as the director tried to decide how to hang them.

I felt for him. The show features seven talented artists. All seven have very different approaches to abstraction. Putting them next to each other would be a little like putting characters from different novels in the same scene. Somebody's going to shout, somebody's going to whisper.

Tony Delap, for instance, creates fascinating, sculptural canvases that sweep across the wall in elegant shapes and bold, minimal colors. They form strange wedges and trapezoids that seem to split into bands of light, almost as if built into the wall. "Buncomb" is matte red, a cropped fin with a dimensional band of almost but not quite cream running through it. Delap's geometry is fascinating and makes you want to walk around something that may only sit an inch off the wall.

Put that next to the work of Connie Goldman and you'll have problems. Goldman does pieced and painted wood sculpture that is also geometrical, but full of right angles to Delap's curves. Her work is on a smaller scale, with muted colors. "Eddy XXIII" is a pale celadon green with tan and butter yellow highlights. It is quiet and complex, a small maze of shape and

shadow. ¶

Lita Albuquerque's wood sculpture is approximately the same size, and all drama and impact, where Goldman is thought and dimension. It is that rich, intense color that could be either purple or blue, depending on your own inclination. The center ground is occupied by a perfect circle of gold that is also scooped out of the surface. Seen from a distance, the gold leaf seems more like a sphere, floating above the purple/blue, moving toward you. ¶

Tricks with color. Jimi Gleason 'squeegees' paint in multiple thin layer onto the canvas. The effect with pearlescent paint in "Through the Reflective Field" is a meditative color field that has a holographic quality, a luminousness totally different from Albuquerque's, a wave quality -- almost a digital effect. ¶

Marcia Roberts' canvases you have to stare at for a while to get. She also produces precise, geometrical shapes like Delap and Goldman. Her color work is unusual, and her flat surfaces have an emerging light source that is full of mystery and softness. "Elkhorn" is done in an almost airbrushed violet, a perfect surface. A rectangle in the middle seems to tilt away from you even as a diagonal beam of light glows outward. ¶

Who does that leave? Alex Couwenberg and James Hayward. There's no clever phrase to get these two artists to segue into each other, or into any of the other artists in the show for that matter. Perhaps we could use something obvious, like brushwork. ¶

Couwenberg's work is atomic cool, glossy and fun. Rectangles bounce around in "Tumble." The ground is an intense crimson; the browns are that great '70s brown that is at once familiar. His work is mod, and the highly layered glaze surface makes it seem almost enameled. ¶

Not so with Hayward, and that may be the biggest understatement ever made in this column. Hayward slathers paint onto the canvas in repetitive strokes that stay in the paint. Hayward sculpts paint with his brush. Different color, different effect: a lime-green canvas is almost lurid ("Abstract No. 57"), but the deeply-carved gray of another ("Abstract No. 87") isn't so dramatic; it's nearly somber. The continuous movement in Hayward's work is fascinating, hypnotic. The revisiting of the same movement over and over again gives his work an obvious importance, a heft that's hard to miss. ¶

The works will all be up by the time this runs, and I'm anxious to see how Peter Blake solved the problem of hanging them. Do they have a common thread? Is it geometry? Dimension? Color? ¶

The show exemplifies the diversity and eclecticism of abstraction; the wide range of responses to the problem of representation artists have faced since the early 20th century; the range of vision that was the whole reason for abstraction in the first place, what it hoped to accomplish: new shapes and forms for expression in art. It runs through July 27. ¶

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