

# ART SPECTRUM

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STANLEY BOXER

## NEW YORK

### CARTER RATCLIFF

#### Doug Ohlson at Susan Caldwell

In his earliest paintings, Ohlson used hard-edges to bring his colors into contact with each other. The variations of hard-edged patterns on the surfaces of his canvases led to variations in the shapes of the canvases themselves. At the extreme point of this development, Ohlson's paintings were made of tall, thin panel-like canvases joined together vertically. These works were like walls, all the more so because they were sometimes made to turn corners. His paintings enclosed space, not sculpturally but in the manner of architecture. Then, several seasons back, Ohlson returned to canvases of more traditional proportions, which he hung on the wall in the traditional way. Along with this change went an abandonment of hard edges. The artist's color appeared in large, more or less circular bursts of sprayed paint. He would give each shape a discrete, intelligible place within an overall color pattern. The result of these clear placements was that the blurred edges of his circles did not lead to indeterminateness. Color was just as self-evidently secure as when he employed hard edges. Sprayed blurriness — blurriness in fact — read as radiant brightness. The facts were overcome. This ability to turn the actual characteristics of his surfaces back on themselves is what has made Ohlson's recent paintings so impressive. In his current show, the discreteness and the resulting intensity of his color-shapes remains. However, the paradox — the transcendence of the facts of the surface — has been deepened. The chief fact of the matter is that his circles with their blurred edges now often touch. In addition, they are all the same color within one painting and are placed against backgrounds of a very similar hue. In certain cases the circles overlap. Yet Ohlson's shapes, hence his colors, maintain their discreteness, hence their intensity. If anything, the willingness to risk the possibility that actual blurriness will become pictorial blurriness gives these works new power. The circles float in shallow space, jostling one another slightly. Each one has its own clear but extremely complex place on the surface. This means a painting's dominant color dominates in fact through repetition, but in effect — and the effect is usually dazzling — it dominates through the richness of the variety with which it presents itself.

#### Joe Zucker at Bykert

This is Joe Zucker's first one-man show in New York, though he has been seen here in group shows since 1969. His work is familiar in spite of its limited exposure because it makes a strong and immediate impression — it is genuinely peculiar. Zucker works in sofron, hardened by roplex, on canvas. Sofron, as it appears in these pictures, reminds me of cotton as it appears in cotton balls. Moistened and given body by roplex, the artist's bits of sofron are stretched and smeared into wide, painterly blobs or twisted into rough, stringy lines. Zucker's palette hovers between earth colors and pastels. His lines and blobs add up, once the roplex has set, to charming and completely disingenuous illustrations of charming subjects — ferris wheels, choo-choo trains, windmills and so on. Having found a way to make pictures with a material that resembles heavily brushed paint but is clearly no such thing, Zucker brings the nature of painterly painting into question. The inflections of texture and hue across a painterly surface — whether representational or not — have always seemed to owe their coherence in part to an ultimately indivisible fluidity. The consistency, the coherent sense, of such surfaces has always seemed to come out of a sheerly material unity symbolizing the unity of the artist's "vision", or perhaps his "presence". Zucker's imitations of brushstrokes are uncannily clever beneath the air of children's book illustrations given off by his imagery. Each bit of sofron, each mimicked brushstroke, is clearly a separate bit of material stuck to the surface. The effect of painterly painting is achieved in a way that rejects the unified surface fundamental to the tradition. Clever mimicry attains high irony here. Zucker puts together a painterly surface as if he were assembling a jigsaw puzzle with flexible pieces. Of course, a delicate hand is required in order to control that flexibility as well as Zucker does — he has "artistic" skill in the traditional sense. However, the main interest of his work is in the way he has rethought that skill. He has learned to apply it in a way that questions the tradition which guides the development of the skill itself.



Ohlson. *Black*, 1974. Oil, 78" x 85". Susan Caldwell.



Zucker. *Big Wheel*, 1974. Sofron and roplex on canvas, d.60". Bykert.

#### Domenick Turturro at Allan Stone

Allover abstraction tends to lure painters toward heroics. Domenick Turturro's new paintings show allover patternings, yet he avoids the difficulties of his style admirably. These are large canvases but not huge ones. They are covered in a gestural fashion, but the artist's hand is always guided by a notion of shape particular to each work. Sometimes this shape is island-like and orange, floating in profusion against a dark background. Sometimes the shapes are fan- or flower-like, scraped onto the surface in arcs to achieve an effect of bright translucency. Occasionally a very subtle reference to printed fabrics is made. Here low-keyed shapes are repeated across the surface with variations that suggest the play of very soft interior light. Turturro's range of color is extraordinary, from keyed-up, "artificial" aquas and magentas to maroons and ochres which seem almost to have acquired a patina of use. This latter effect is an illusion, a helpful one. It reminds the viewer that paintings do indeed have a use — they are intended to engage the eye. This can be done, as so many allover painters attempt to do it, by overwhelming the eye. Turturro, as I suggested, avoids the grandiose by holding the scale of pictorial incident to a very intimate scale. The eye enters his paintings where shapes float toward each other or touch or overlap in especially interesting ways. The eye stays with the painting be-