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EDITOR: JAMES FITZSIMMONS

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CARTER RATCLIFF:

often forced upon her patterns—which are appropriated from various sources, chiefly Moslem. Force here is gently and intelligently employed: paintings result in which the undeniable fascination of individual patterns is not submerged but, rather, augmented by the spatial complexities which arrive from Kozloff's delicate high-handedness. Each pattern spreads out to hold the surface, but the disparities between them put the pictorial surface in an extremely ambiguous "place". One takes up a position from which these ambiguities become interesting in themselves.

Ned Smythe presented an extremely fine set of tableaux at the Holly Solomon Gallery. They consisted of cast concrete elements arranged to form alleys of pillars, arbors, suggestions of garden walls . . . Smythe's style is ironically reductionist. He subjects traditional architectural elements to severe remakings: everything comes out with a new clarity and linear aggressiveness. It's not always clear—so intense are Smythe's reductions—what his sources are. There was a strong suggestion of Egyptian capitals in some of his columns. The irony appears as one notes that the artist's obscurantism is the result of reductionist procedures that were intended to make perception clearer by raising sculpture "above" style; and, further, that Smythe's use of these reductionist procedures has resulted in an idiosyncratically elegant style. Minimalism is turned back on itself; or, one might say, Smythe has led it down the garden path.

A few seasons back, Michael Balog showed blank canvases to which a blow-torch had been applied. He seemed to be responding—rather violently—to certain "issues" in then-contemporary painting: the integrity of the support, the nature of pictorial space, the relationship of internal configurations to the shape of the surface, and so on. The blow-torch didn't settle anything; rather, it produced starkly decorative objects which left the "issues" themselves unscorched. You might say they didn't even break out into a sweat. In his latest show—at the Lamagna Gallery—Balog has made each painting-like object quite different from the next. It's as though he had decided that the "issues" needn't be confronted anymore, though the inventiveness cultivated during his struggle with those strange entities has persisted and matured.

One of his new works is made of a sheet of plywood. The sheet has been sawed along the lines of its surface grain. An application of black spray paint emphasizes the tonal contrasts of the original surface. And the pieces have been tied back together with string. The result is decidedly odd. Means employed by painters, sculptors and carpenters have been

brought to a single work, which looks finally like a painter's trompe-l'œil evocation of a sculptor's semi-trompe-l'œil—i.e., low relief. There is a self-portrait in this show. It is done in a knowingly rough—New York-ish—representational style. A child's clock in the shape of a cat has been attached to its surface. Which, as time goes by, will count as the *real* self-portrait? Another painting shows a glass man and his shadow. Since the glass man is transparent, he casts a shadow of a shiny, metallic surface which is much more substantial than the ghostly image of the man himself. Balog's ironies are whacky but effective. I think this has something to do with the desperation with which he attacked the "issues" of painting, as they were defined by others. After a full-scale failure to conquer those adversaries, Balog has found himself able to undertake a full-scale engagement with his own, very private concerns.

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For all the triviality of so much contemporary abstract painting, Cavallon and others continue to make it pertinent. One of the others is Doug Ohlson. In his highly individual way, he treats the blank canvas as a fearsome thing, and confronts it with the directness which leads to painting in the mode we call abstract. He continues to do monochromes. Bursts of a single color are spaced more or less regularly across medium-sized to large canvases. From certain angles, a surface will appear to be a simple monochrome blank. As one's position changes, configurations—color-bursts crowding each other—reveal themselves. Color becomes a "function" not so much of hue as of the varying reflectiveness which occurs as one's viewing angle changes. Perhaps this is an exaggerated way of saying that Ohlson has joined hue and its vehicle, the paint, in an extraordinary intimacy. His monochromes (and near-monochromes—sometimes an underlying field shows through) are generous challenges to the viewer's ability to become conscious of the minutest inflections of his own perceptions. The answer to this, which critics have yet to answer effectively, is that anything in the world offers such a challenge. All I can say is that Ohlson and a few others somehow make it clear that their challenges are intentional, intended. That makes all the difference—the difference between the world's arbitrary "interestingness" and those aspects of it (artworks of all kinds) in which consciousness has a true interest (an interest fundamental to consciousness itself). I'm not arguing for art-for-consciousness'-sake; rather, for *art as the* locale of a reflexiveness that can get to know itself in the vicinity of art, and then look beyond art with a steadier gaze, a gaze less frail and naive, less dependent on the ideological props which obscure our vision of art and other things . . .