

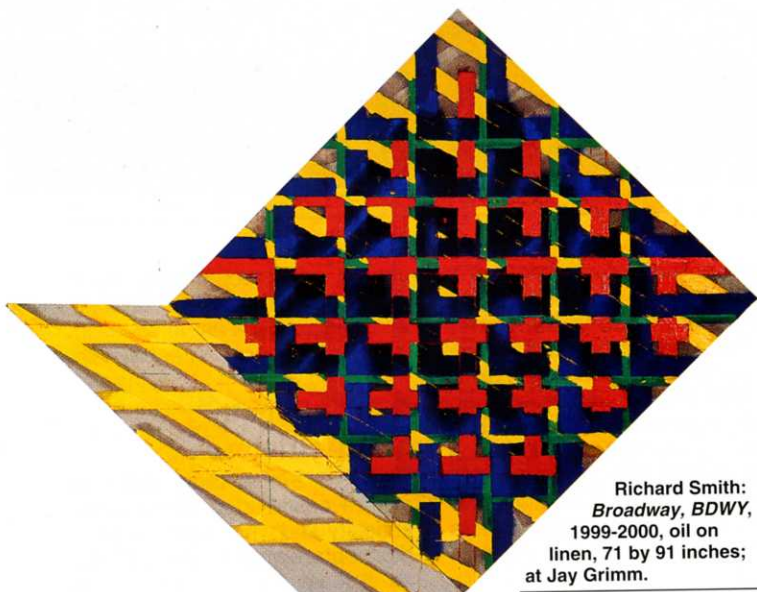
Art in America

JULY 2001

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\$5.00 USA
\$7.00 CAN £3.50 UK



Richard Smith:
Broadway, BDWY,
1999-2000, oil on
linen, 71 by 91 inches;
at Jay Grimm.

coming away impressed with the idea that art could be so playfully light and so reasonable.

In this show of work from 1999 to 2000, Smith utilizes linen gessoed on the reverse side and stretched on square supports that he tilts into diamond shapes. From the bare bones of a penciled grid, he begins an additive painting program that plays improvisationally off the drafted structure. Deeply saturated, brusquely painted color jazzily crisscrosses the surface, intercut with a kind of breathing space where Smith leaves the raw linen exposed. In three of the four large paintings that made up the exhibition, long rectangles are attached to the sides of the central diamond shape in order to relieve some of the density that occurred from building up a weave of athletically painted diagonal and perpendicular color bands.

A trapezoidal rectangle is mounted on the lower left of one diamond-shaped canvas, *Broadway, BDWY*. Its perspectively skewed cadmium yellow lattice-work provides an underlying structure for the straight-up-and-down bright red and cobalt blue stripes that zip across the diamond shape. There are also residual notes of viridian underpainting and thin trails of linear color, the remainders of painting decisions that ultimately were not executed but add to the map of the surface.

The hints of the pastoral that were in some of Smith's previous work are gone now, replaced by abstracted refer-

ences to crosswalks and building facades. These new paintings counterpoint their structure and rich color with an urban grittiness, like an elegant woman in evening wear stepping out onto the macadam of a New York street.

—Joe Fyfe

Phil Sims at Stark

Phil Sims's work has changed, although for those whose eyes glaze over at the sight of monochrome paintings, the difference won't register. While Sims often creates on a monumental scale for museum installations or for collections like Count Giuseppe Panza's, his new work presents a less public presence. The format is large enough so that the color has authority, yet small enough so that authority is not dissipated. Of course color can be made to successfully span large fields, but by scaling down somewhat, Sims allows different sensations to emerge, a greater intimacy, a more private response.

These paintings, all vertical and dated 2000, come in a broader array of colors than Sims usually exhibits together, perhaps a formalist's nod to diversity. In the rear gallery were a red, a blue and a yellow painting, but the red is almost blue, the blue-red almost purple, and the intense, volatile yellow dims and brightens as you gaze at it (Sims calls them *Untitled Red*, *Untitled Dark Violet*, *Untitled Yellow*). Each verges on another tonality, another character, another kind of balance between stroke, color and light, which makes these surfaces complex,

unstable and consequently intriguing; if you looked hard enough, you might resolve the ambiguities, but most likely not, since they are built in.

Shown in the main gallery were *Untitled Orange*, warm with a cool sheen; *Untitled Lavender*, cool with a warm sheen; and *Green Portrait #10*, which is more of a teal, a green that teeters toward blue, teasing the eye. *Untitled White* is actually green, but just barely, more like the thought of green, while *Untitled Umber* is a deep, luscious, chocolate brown.

Construction loosened, process revealed, these oil paintings move between surface and depth and are breachable. You can see into them. The strokes play across plush, velvety surfaces—art for the fingertips, but don't touch—as markings of a free-floating plus-and-minus system that advances and recedes. Sims is reveling in a beauty that is more in the foreground than before. His work is retinal art of a high order and a reminder that however compelling Duchamp's point of view, it is not the only one.

—Lilly Wei

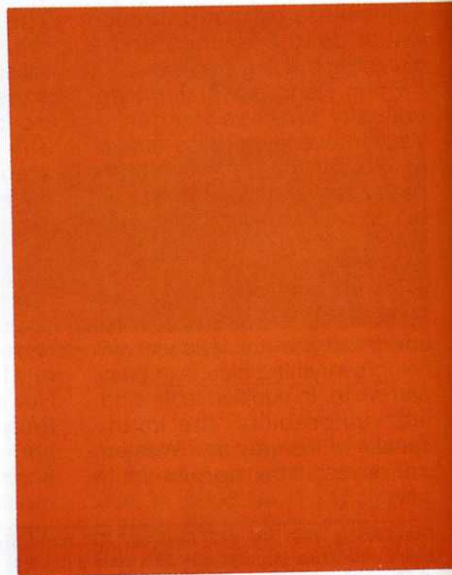
Doug Ohlson at Andre Zarre

For some time, Doug Ohlson has been framing his take on the figure-and-ground problem in terms of geometry versus expressionism. In the paintings in this recent exhibition (all acrylic on canvas), he creates the illusion that hard-edged rectangles float in front of grounds that are freely brushed or stained, creating an intriguing tension, almost as if the organic had generated the ideal. While on the structural level these paintings resemble each other, the performance of each is specific and unique.

The basic unit, often repeated several times within a single horizontal canvas, is a narrow, vertical, painterly field with a vertical rectangle painted on it. Ohlson also applies long, thin bands of color, sometimes over

the long sides of the larger rectangles, sometimes over the backgrounds, forcing the freely brushed ground into a rectilinear conduit. Subtly subverting expectations, he may border the rectangle on both sides, on one side or not at all. Elsewhere, he dispenses with the large rectangle altogether, leaving only the borders. This has the effect of intimating a rectangular space within the two parallel strips.

Ghost Light (2000) is one of the most successful pieces. Ohlson varies his regular structure by making two rectangles within each of four vertical quadrants. In three cases, the inner verticals are each bordered on their outer edges by painted strips of obviously different hue from both the background and the foreground shapes. In one case, the color used to edge the rectangles is so close to the



Phil Sims: *Untitled Orange*, 2000, oil on linen,
60 by 50 inches; at Stark.

background hue that it all but disappears, leaving the two rectangles freely afloat in that quadrant.

The paintings reveal playful but not capricious color choices within their formal frameworks. The colors are often high-key but eschew quick optical effects for slower vibrant resonances. The viewer was gratified by long observation of these pieces, as loosely painted edges began to pulsate in relation to the straight

