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# Doug Ohlson's Fields of Meaning

*Covering 20 years of this prolific abstractionist's output, a recent New York exhibition examined the visual and metaphorical subtleties of his large-scale paintings.*

**BY CARTER RATCLIFF**

Since the mid-1960s, Doug Ohlson has been making large paintings from blocks and bands of color. Having established these premises, he has stuck with them, giving his oeuvre a sweeping consistency. Whatever faith a long career as an abstract painter requires, Ohlson has kept it, unwaveringly but never predictably. Every season he offers surprises, usually subtle but sometimes not. In 1982, he made a basic change in the way his images work. Until that year, his pigments had been opaque. Then, as the art historian Richard Stapleford notes, "he began to use translucent colors loosely painted in large, adjacent panels. Pictorial space in his earlier work was created by the vibration between two . . . colors. With these new translucent colors, surface and depth are redefined as within the picture space, not in front of it."<sup>1</sup>

