"POST-HYPNOTIC"

UNIVERSITY GALLERIES OF ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY
NORMAL, ILLINOIS

JAMES YOOD

All paintings are created optically, but some are more optical than others. In "post-hypnotic," organized by Barry Blinderman, the works of twenty-eight contemporary painters put the human retina on trial, reminding us that what we see depends on how we see, and that other realms of vision can open out from the unstable act of seeing. Visual slippages, dizzying afterimages, pulsating surfaces, and eye-popping patterns (which lead on occasion to a vertigo-induced nausea) abound here. This is an exhibition that asks, What happens when the viewer loses control of the picture plane?

Looking back as far as the mid-'80s—the era in which Blinderman made a name for himself as a New York gallerist—with works by Ross Bleckner, Peter Halley, Jim Isermann, Walter Robinson, Peter Schuyff, and Philip Taaffe, he begins to make a case that differentiates the dynamic visual effects of recent painting from those of '60s Op. While echoes of Yaacov Agam, Richard Anuszkiewicz, Bridget Riley, and Victor Vasarely linger (as do hints of latter-day retro-psychedelia), Blinderman's premise that the visual conjurations of current artists don't just sit on the surface of the painting, they transgress the frame and move right into the viewer's space—a realm profoundly complicated in recent years by spectacular advances in computer graphics and digital special effects, by IMAX virtuality and Magic Eye conundrums—is pretty convincing. Op art's formal precision and sober two-dimensionality is the jumping-off point for works that range from playful to composed, insouciant to jarring, from campily distant to feverishly immediate. The dislocations integral to these works exist not at the level of the object but at its intersection with the psychophysiology of vision. Extending and intensifying Op art and pattern-painting strategies, "post-hypnotic" procedures ape new visual technologies, increase pictorial velocity, and cunningly exploit the limits of human sight.

For many of the artists, an obsessive commitment to repetitive, miniature linear pattern creates the visual waffling they desire. In Susie Rosmarin's exhausting (and strangely exhilarating) *Static Study #45*, 1998—made by an endlessly repeated process of taping and painting, taping and painting, to create hundreds of "clean" lines—the combination of the painting's large scale, its minute detail, and unavoidable minor errors (despite the overarching regularity of her procedure) makes her tight grid buckle and wobble, slightly, almost imperceptibly, at first, then more intensively, as the eye grapples for an order that remains elusive. The irreconcilable dichotomy of the handwrought and the purely geometrical animates her work. Fred Tomaselli's *Thirteen Thousand*, 1992 (its 13,000 individual aspirin tablets stacked in some fifty vertical rows and sealed in resin), might be seen as an incredible variation on classic color-field stripes. It shares a certain coy yet manic quality, a cool, distanced stubbornness that characterizes the abstraction of so many of these artists. Mark Dagley's *Concentric Sequence #1*, 1996, a targetlike image of thousands of circles of colored dots that decrease in scale as they approach the picture's center, delivers on Blinderman's distinction between Op art proper and the more recent work on view here: Dagley's painting is less pointillist than pixelist. As you negotiate your way through a Dagley or Rosmarin maze, everything seems to radiate, and your vision, as if under the influence of hypnosis or hallucinogens, fails to digest all it takes in, even as your brain processes pictorial information you know doesn't exist.

OP ART'S FORMAL PRECISION IS THE JUMPING-OFF POINT FOR WORKS THAT RANGE FROM CAMPILY DISTANT TO FEVERISHLY IMMEDIATE.

Painterly works that deploy their effects on a more material, physical level support Blinderman's argument less directly, but still prove tantalizing. Karin Davie's *Wanted*, 1998, suggests a striped color-field abstraction turned to taffy, then pulled and refolded into meandering waves of paint—oily eddies whose viscous coursing exerts a soporific effect. Judy Ledgerwood's *In The Groove*, 1996, a summery saturation of lemon yellows with pale lavender undertones, begins to shimmer the moment you lay eyes on it, ghost images altering one's perception of the painting's color and composition: Indeed, the viewer becomes a kind of privileged if unwitting accomplice to the work's hallucination.

"Post-hypnotic" invites the conclusion that the viewer's mind is as viable a surface on which to work as the canvas itself. While no work of art can be considered independently of the activity of looking, here the biological, chemical, and psychological mechanisms of sight present a new locus for the manipulation of visual order. These paintings, which exploit inevitable visual missteps, afford the potential for a subversion that strikes at the heart of what it means to see and to know. □

Left to right: **Ross Bleckner, *Brothers' Swords*, 1986**, oil on canvas. 108 x 84". Steve DI Benedetto, ***Scan***, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 42". **Karin Davie, *Wanted*, 1998**, oil on canvas, 72 x 96". Installation view.

James Yood writes regularly for *Artforum*.

"Post-hypnotic" travels to the McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas, June 12–July 25; the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Sept. 4–Nov. 7; the Atlanta College of Art Gallery, Jan. 28–Mar. 12, 2000; the Chicago Cultural Center, Apr. 22–June 25, 2000; the Tweed Museum, University of Minnesota, Duluth, Feb. 6–Apr. 2001.