

# ARTFORUM

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## DAVID ROW

### JOHN GOOD GALLERY

There's a barely suppressed sensuousness in David Row's paintings, even a sense of antic play. Beneath a surface that appears at first to be reductively geometric — with its broad curves and zigzags, painted in white on white or black on black — lurk fields of color, mostly reds and blues, that Row allows to peak through incisions scratched into the surface. Not that the layer of color is independent of the surface; often the underpainting is divided into red and blue, in the same way the surface image is divided into the curving and angular forms and the spaces between them. Row further complicates the formal play between illusionistic and actual space by working across several canvases, sometimes butted against each other, in other cases hung as much as a foot or two apart. Thus the figures of one canvas will carry over to the next, but not in a smooth, continuous motion; in other instances, the figures may even mirror one another. Where the eye wants to unify the different sections into one image, Row will insist on each one being seen both as itself and as part of the ensemble.

This multipart format also allows Row to use the inner edges of the canvases to



David Row, *Untitled*, 1989,  
oil and wax on canvas, 64 x 40"

strengthen further the game of emotional and spatial layering set up by the contrast between his neutral surfaces and intensely colored underpainting. In one four-paneled work (all *Untitled*, 1989), three sections are placed flush against each other, with the fourth a bit apart; the inner edges of the joint between the center two canvases have been left bright blue, and the resulting line — which can be seen as a particularly deep incision into the plane formed by the juxtaposed canvases — dominates the smooth arcs and angled bands of the surface figure. Once the underlying color has succeeded in breaking up the pristine regularity of the surface image, it becomes apparent that even the curves and zigzags themselves are not quite what they seem to be. The whites and blacks are a little too lush, the curves a little too fat and sweeping to support the kinds of transcendental aspirations suggested by the geometric forms in the work of Kasimir Malevich or Ad Reinhardt. Instead, this kind of smart formal and coloristic play links Row to a number of other contemporary artists engaged in similar investigations of the balance between reason and feeling, among them David Reed and Harvey Quaytman. Despite their deceptively simple terms, Row's paintings have a sense of dynamism about them, as if they were constantly on the verge of becoming something else — and then, perhaps, becoming themselves again. By combining slightly off geometrical forms with richly expressive color, Row attempts to bridge the gap between system and intuition, concept and action.

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