

David Row

It is difficult to imagine that a painter could remain both progressive and consistent in an age when the motivations for painting appear so totally pulverized by the marketing strategies of the former decade and the momentary collapse of a once accelerated economy. There are some who will treat such an observation with disdain, yet it is impossible to deny that profound changes have occurred in recent months that have signaled a more conservative approach to the enterprise of painting from the point of view of gallerists. Yet it is exemplary to discover that some painters can still emit intellectual content in their art without sacrificing certain rarified emotions that have always sustained a belief that painting has something to tell us that is beyond the facility of the moment. Such a painter is David Row, and the recent show of his work at the John Good Gallery was an occasion that stood out among the worn strategies of other painters to come to terms with waning public interest.

Row is a mature painter who has evolved a point of view over the past two decades. His approach to abstraction is neither imposed nor hyperbolized; it is simply an approach. To speak of Row's evolving concerns as a painter as having a point of view is both literally and metaphorically accurate. What happens in a Row painting is largely about the location of the perceiving subject in relation to the spatial object. The question is raised: Where does one locate the center within the object of the surface in order to ascertain one's position in the space outside it?

Row has two sustaining elements in his approach to painting: the disjunctive use of panels as a separating device in relation to the continuum of the surface, and the swirling elliptical shapes that bind the surface within these panels. The ellipses often contain the quality of a dislocating site, a vortex of energy that pulls the eye inward and out again. The resolution in Row's surfaces is not always apparent, but it is always lingering just beyond the obvious. Row's bold juxtaposition



David Row, Untitled, 1990, oil and wax on canvas, 36x28 in.



David Row, 1991, installation.

of color and surface textures, such as in his recent *Theta* (1990-91), borrow from many sources; yet the color is unnatural to the extent that it rarely

adheres to external representation. The landscape, for example, seems far distant from the more plainly constructive lyricism that Row suggests at every turn.

There is a lot to see in a painting by David Row. To distill the fragments of space into a single concrete image is nearly impossible. As much as Row has implied concretion of form in earlier work, his new paintings engender a more complex involvement with the surface, a surface of dislocation that opens the frame of reference into the space of architecture, never losing contact with itself.

Robert C. Morgan

At John Good Gallery, New York