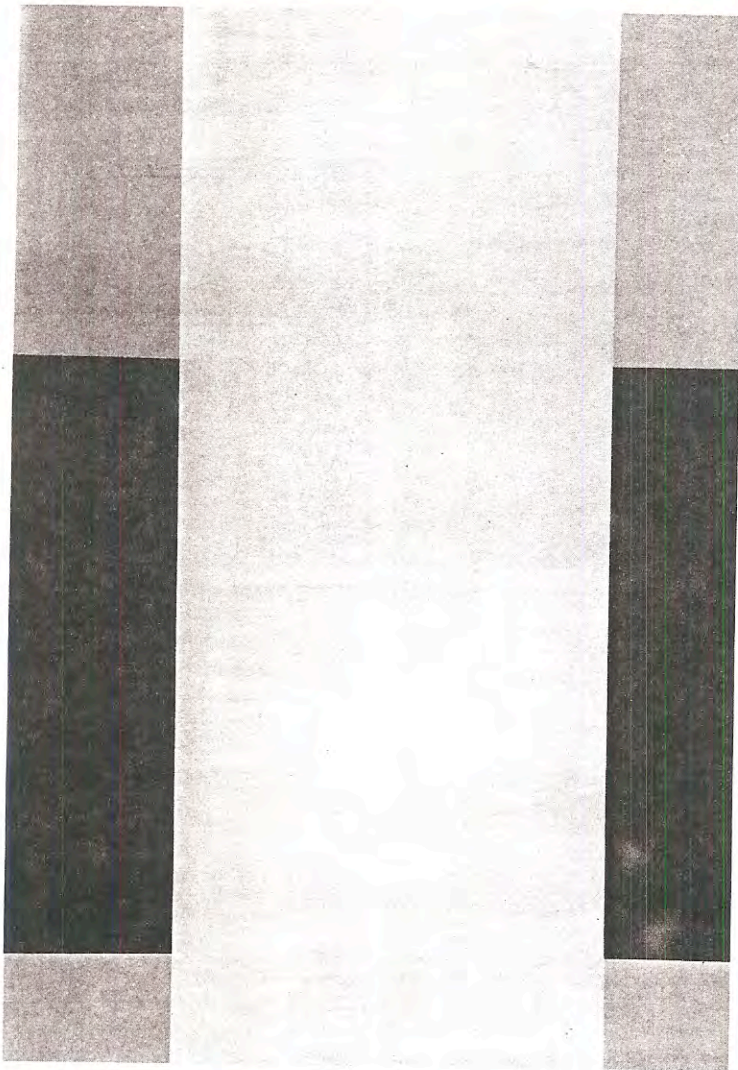


A RENEWAL OF
POSSIBILITIES

LENORE GOLDBERG
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Nassos Daphnis, #28-58
(1958), 68" x 48",
Magna on canvas.
Courtesy:
Leo Castelli Gallery.

Nassos Daphnis's involvement with control and reductivism spans more than the fifteen years covered in his show of paintings and sculpture. In search of an ideal tension of form and color, his work reflects a continued hope for some rational higher plane of order. They are like philosophic discourse, anti-sensual, anti-romantic. They are the paintings of a Calvinist; strong, solid, full of conviction, and set apart.

From 1958, the surface of his work has changed from an absorptive acrylic to a shiny epoxy rawness. Although the notations of stripes, rectangles, diamonds and arcs are positioned on the material of the pictures, the reflection of the plastic paint throws them off the canvas and paper into the room.

Moving away from the contained structure of the stretcher bars, he now is involved with rearrangeable interlocking hexagons. This indicated further possibilities for the multiple presentation of his color theory condensed into one work.

The abstracted iconic quality of the 1958 painting, a blue rectangle bounded on both sides by red and black divided strips, is continued in 22-59. Black vertical bands of uneven width exert pressure on the interior, alternating stripes of white. Not only does this utilize a figure-ground play to tense a simple design, but the weight and ambiguity of the stripes questions the line, form, edge definition. Daphnis's painting and sculpture seem to have drawn from a distilled neo-plastic aesthetic. While *S-PX-19-3D-62*, a free-standing revolving plexi-glass construction initially impressed me as a neutral piece, the essential elegance builds a sense of honed

strength as the controlled alternation of red and clear plastic creates a careful illusion of transparent mirrored images. The 1966 painting *30-66* marks a period of increased surface complexity for the Greek-born artist. The small scale of the piece is overweighted by the inset stripes, circles and squares, making it one of the weaker additions to the show. His work seems to demand a large scale.

I am uneasy with Daphnis allowing viewers to manipulate the 1971 hexagons of black, yellow red and midnight blue. Yet it seems that the participation aspect of the painting allows a greater accessibility, an immediate understanding of Daphnis's own working process.

Alan Finkel's recent large-scale sculptures show a marvelous economy and quickness of gesture as they swiftly cut the space of the room, dispensing with much of the formal heaviness seen in recent three dimensional work. They seem accessible and human-scaled despite the attenuated 24 feet of space they claim, because of their speed and linearity. The clarity of shape, the sharpness of editing and the straightforward manner in which they are assembled give some clue for the satisfying reading of his minimal pared-down forms.

His constructions are built with blue green strips of polyvinyl chloride, a pliable plastic that he has refinished to the dull luster of brushed metal and single 24 foot standard lengths of steel rods, which form tripod assemblies seeming on the perpetual brink of falling over. This containment of energy involves intelligent consideration of weight, buoyancy, balance, and movement. Changing the

way, is nevertheless utilizing a known field of force that can be worked with in a predictable manner.

The works of four painters are grouped together in a show at the Poindexter Gallery: Harvey Quaytman (sandy, built up, literal surface), Jack Whitten (transparent, tough skinned color tightly wedged space), Jake Berthot (quiet, intensely concentrated image) and Gary Hudson (a gamble of fuzzily defined ambiguities in a multi-textured pushing, pulling space). It is a show which zeroes in on some now current ways and means for responding to the painted surface and paint situations.

The application of color, pigment, and other materials to a surface explains and recreates the varied potentials of the medium, from the declaration of its physical properties to stain, cover, cake, and drip, to building sympathetic equivalencies of clarity, harmony, conflict and ambiguity — complex signs of the painter's concern.

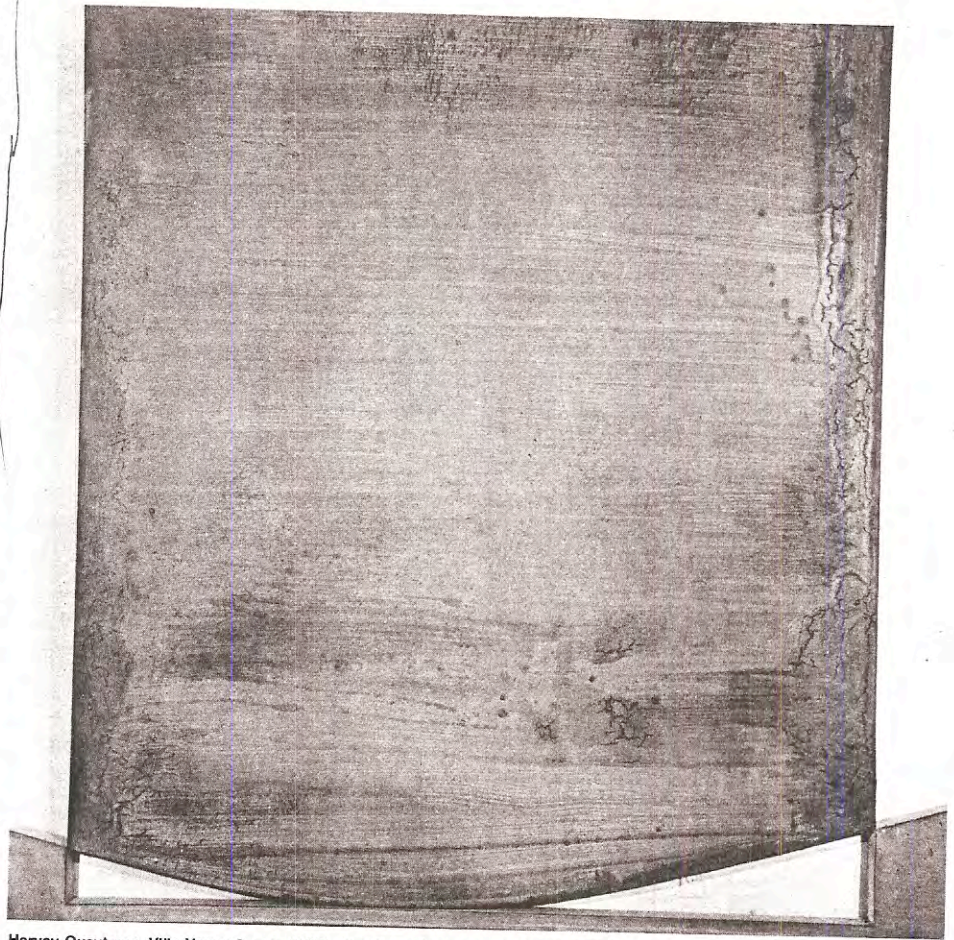
The majority of paintings in this show are unevenly successful as they hedged about, remaining solidly rooted in the center of one or two of these possibilities while giving tentative, only pre-emptory nods to the other areas. The reason I question their position is that they seem to imply, by scale, sheer amount of paint, by a quality of breaking loose energy and obvious intelligence to be seeking greater expansion. Nevertheless, I still think they are paintings which should be looked at.

Villa Venus Senior and *Sombrero*, the two Quaytman paintings, set up situations of conversational balance and imbalance. The odd shape of his paintings is immediately precarious. While the bulk and weight of the upper rectangle completely overwhelms the cut-out bridge on which it rests and bears down, the joining edge of these two shapes is unpressured like a soft kiss. The upper has the greater accumulation of paint, re-emphasizing the proportions of the relationship. The hot, synthetic azalea pink Quaytman uses in *Villa Venus*, at first repulsed me, until its position in relation to the sandy, limestone ochre (which it tints and marries) became clear. It is another offshooting aspect of balance. Quaytman's relationship to his edge is offbeat. There is an implied linearity, defining the perimeter of his canvas, invisible bands that shoot up around the sides, pushing in on the work, while the stopped gesture painted on top defines a frame and equalizes the pressure. Equilibrium.

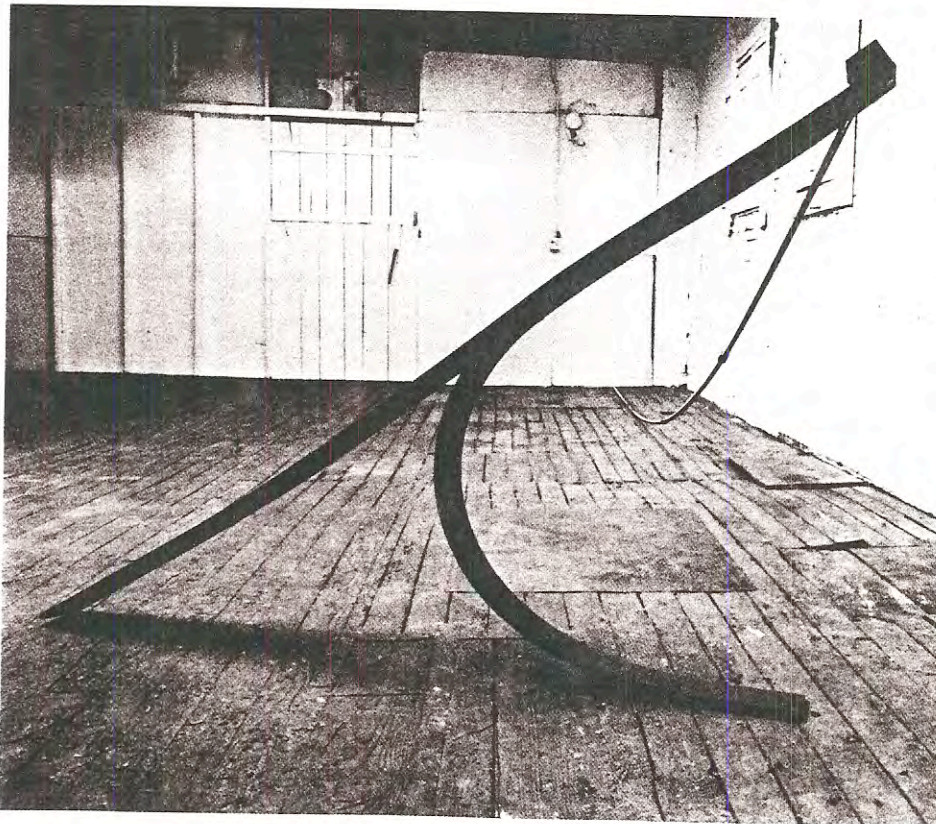
While the Quaytman paintings are about a contained weighted gesture, the two by Jack Whitten are more like interruptions of a continuous sidesweep. *Midnight Stripper* is a dark flicker of orange covered with blues and greens. He discreetly holds in place what would otherwise be an obliquely angled plane with light vertical sprays of glitter silver

which also counter and stop the horizontal velocity. The positioning of the plane does not seem to be resting easily. The picture plane is curiously transparent as if the color activity is taking place below the surface and occasionally allowed to break the skin; edges appear that are like residual marks of the painter's touch. The all-of-a-cloth mixing of color as he grandly sweeps across the canvas is remarkable, but this painting has a lot of compositional hedges that make it seem slightly shaky. *O'posdepote*, the second Whitten painting is a more opaquely-surfaced work. A sneaky brown line locks in the tinted cobalt blue painting, striped through with violet and purpled umber: a picture of reappearing and disappearing colors. The variety of positioning, the on-the-spot mixing of pigment and the confidently moving gesture make this a tougher piece.

Jack Berthot's low-slung double canvas, *Nymphared*, establishes a very different feeling of bearing down weight than Quaytman's. The symmetrical panels of the larger are brushed into, waxed, buffed, raised and stained. The painting glows with a dull, polished sheen. It is the waiting, concentration of the strong central image of touched involving paint that displaces the greater mass, not the physical unavailability of *Villa Venus's* surface. With movement established by the repeated framing edges, Berthot takes a quick hop and skip into the dense tar of color and paint of the silent center. The restricted variety of color, applied to the surface in a wide range of weights and moves, counters the repeated composition of his painting, which through this repetition has become a fairly neutral factor. *Nymphared* shifts this neutrality by the implication of compression as the two halves bear in on each other.



Harvey Quaytman, *Villa Venus Senior* (1972), 9' x 9' acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Poindexter Gallery.



Alan Finkel, *Untitled* (1972), 24' x 4 1/2', Polyvinylchloride and steel rod. Collection: the artist.

The Hudson painting, *Sandbar*, while clearly an ambitious painting, disappoints for a number of reasons. It is organized into overlapping, ambiguously defined areas of alternating textures, stains, thin washes and buttery peaks of pulled-away paint. The run of colors narrowly miss a decorative pastel tone. There is a lack of crispness. The four upright narrow strips that march across the surface are too much of the same texture with the space immediately around them. It is a disturbing texture, spotted across the back and foreground. The multi-hued, earth green, ochre, orange and pink painting is organized into planes moving back from the narrow bars to a discretely hazy rectangle that paces the minimal push and pull of the bars. It is at this point that the fudged edges of the strips become the most frustrating. It seems to me that if there is to be a tension between forms, textures or colors, some hard definitions must be established so that saturation or flip-flop can occur. Because there has been only a partial definition of these areas in this painting, the movement and the color becomes mired rather than subtle. However it is dealing with a large area of paint history and has a longer distance to fall short.

Two paintings which I recently saw at the Paula Cooper Gallery emphasize the difference between pictures which establish situations of paint and those which paint situations. Two of many stances possible for painters.

The 1970 David Diaio painting, *Lucas*, is like a Faustian struggle: a reciprocal testing by the painter and his material to see what the other can do. It is here that Diaio's remarkable technical profi-