

The New York Times

November 10, 2006

Art in Review; Stanley Whitney -- Breathing Sound

By HOLLAND COTTER

Esso
531 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through tomorrow

Technically, I guess, Stanley Whitney's painting belongs in a Modernist tradition of geometric abstraction, one that would include scientists like Josef Albers and atheist-mystics like Ad Reinhardt. But where their art is based on balance and regularity, Mr. Whitney's is about imbalance within a paradigm of balance, irregularity that invokes regularity to depart from it.

In his compositions of high-color squares and rectangles set edge-to-edge between horizontal bands, the geometric elements vary in size; the supporting bands are unevenly spaced; some surfaces are matte, others brushy. There may well be a mathematics to the variations, but it isn't an obvious one.

Also, in this geometric abstraction, the geometry is notably pliant, casual even. The bands tilt a little, or sag; the sides of squares and rectangles lean and bulge, sometimes bleed into each other. As a result, everything has the softness and yieldingness of cloth without evoking specific kinds of textiles. For one thing, no textiles have colors quite so sharp and complicated. And it is in color that Mr. Whitney picks up the Modernist connection again, linking to Albers, or Albers plus Matisse, and does his own thing with it, makes a sensuous science.

HOLLAND COTTER