

## Colors That Speak: From Classics to Lloyd Martin

by JOHN GOODRICH on May 8, 2012 • 4:42 pm

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery's busy and exuberant installation of works on paper (...On Paper) reflects the sheer diversity of American art in the 1940s through '70s. The three dozen drawings, collages, mixed media works and paintings on paper cover a lot of ground—everything from Gaston Lachaise's breezy line drawing of a nude to Nancy Grossman's tightly wound drawing of a leather-bound head. But the bulk of the show presents an intriguing mix of mid-century trends, from abstract expressionism to geometric abstraction to figurative images ranging from the surreal to the socially conscious.



Celebrated artists such as de Kooning, Krasner, Baziotis and Stamos ably represent the New York School, but Anne Ryan's abstraction—a remarkably atmospheric collage of off-white bits of paper and fabric—seems most comfortable with the usually smaller scale of works on paper; its meditative, deliberated design seems closer in spirit to the spry geometric abstractions by Burgoyne Diller and Charmion von Weigand.

Among several surrealism-tinged pieces, Pavel Tchelitchev's watercolor of an artery-enclosed head eerily combines the sensual and the psychedelic. It could hardly differ more from Morris Graves' serene paean to nature, a painting in tempera of a stylized falcon, on view in the gallery's office.

Other figurative works include brightly colored collages by Romare Bearden and Benny Andrews that pointedly address racial issues. But the most biting commentary of all comes from Robert Colescott's loopy, mock-cheerful sketch of aprancing, top-hatted pair: a leggy blonde closely tailed by a limber black youth. Beneath appears a line from a Robert Louis Stevenson poem: "I have a little shadow..."

And then there's the gouache by Bob Thompson, who, before his death at 30, produced a body of paintings uniquely inflected by Pop, surrealism and folk art. Charged with vibrant but measured hues, his image of fantastical creatures—they appear to be erecting a wall—adds to the show a singular note of funky classicism.

With his latest solo exhibition, *Mettere* at Stephen Haller Gallery, Lloyd Martin continues to explore the rhythms of the industrial architecture around his Provincetown studio. To the artist's great credit, his paintings are never merely descriptive. They could just as easily be aerial views of city scenes, in the manner of Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie-Woogie," only paced by large planes of scraped and streaked color.

The artist's recent work has taken on bolder colors and juicier textures, as evidenced in the nearly 6-foot-square canvas "Check" (2012). Martin is a shrewd colorist, and vivid hues animate this composition of sturdy, repetitive horizontals divided by subtler verticals. The artist knows how to set a brushy scarlet against a warmer, more buoyant red, or a heavy, stilled ochre-green against an electric greenish yellow. As slim horizontal rectangles, laid one above the other, climb up the canvas, they move through such contrasting notes, occasionally encountering a long off-white rectangle that compels a sideways shift, where the climbing begins anew.

If a Mondrian is kind of visual haiku—a contained poem, with each note finding its own indispensable weight and location—a painting like "Check" is more like a prose poem. Martin may not attempt Mondrian's elemental velocity of form, but his interests are wider, encompassing textures, passages and surfaces.

At points, though, his paintings also achieve a Mondrianesque climax of rhythm. In the 2-foot-square "Shim Series (5)" (2012), a pair of thin reds, differentiated in temperature, are pressed to the canvas's edges by broadly competing planes of brilliant yellow and earthy green at the center. Little prisms of color, not bright in color but crucial in their locations, sputter in the interstices between these larger forms.

Why, if colors and shapes could only speak ... but of course they do, once you get beyond the basic feats of style and technique, and in a painting like this you're liable to find an earful.