

RICHARD ALPERT: THE PROCESS IS THE PAINTING

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August 29, 1981

Richard Alpert's new works at the Shirley Cerf Gallery are large scale collages of pure luminous colors which line up or fan out in big airplane propeller-like displays. Within the immediate powerful impression of graduating color and carefully structured forms, the works' true interest seems to be in process of the visual recording of a dialectic between artist and medium which centers on the possibilities of paint within an unusual format: the box. The paintings, then represent the visual residue of an investigation. They are lovely, highly ordered and arranged, and if one looks closely, contain the patterns of controlled and random actions that are the tracks of the artist as he moves through the process of making his art.

Mean/Ends is 32'w x 31'h x 6"d, a long painting, a kind of spectrum of impressionistic color that moves from orange to blue. Each individual section of color, which together form the full spectrum, is characterized by its own mix of hue. At either end of the work hangs what is, literally, a box. Each box seems to culminate the painting, combining half of the colors (from orange to red and from green to blue) on its surface. Clearly, each of the panels of color making up the painting might fit perfectly within one of these ending boxes. It is a though the work as a whole is the recorded evidence of how the painting was made; an allusion to the unspecified relationship between the various colors, the

mounting of several colors in the box and to the process of deriving the colors and the function of the lid in that process. The viewer can only deduce that Alpert utilizes some process by which pigment is placed in a lidded box and physically shaken. This process takes place over time and leaves its visual record on the walls of the box as to the physical mixing of paint. Each panel produced by this process has a beautiful surface. Perhaps more importantly, each panel has a similar surface, where not only the quality of the color - the areas of impasto or luminosity and the scarring from the other objects also shaken within the box are visible - but where the direction of motion is recorded by a trail on each section. It is suggestive of images of distant galaxies somehow - no doubt the sweep of stars is also the evidence of some rotating motion and subject to the natural forces that also create patterns of smashed paint within the confines of Alpert's boxes.

The surface of each of the works, from the small fully contained boxes, to the individual panels making up the larger works, is finely tuned and delicate- perhaps best described by imagining a section of a luminous Seurat painting that has been magnified. The resulting surfaces of the paintings are as intense and gentle as pointillism. By the mere size of the box lids Alpert incorporates into the final works suggest that the process he uses requires a physical and aggressive action. It is difficult to imagine how the process gives rise to the delicate product in this sense-one expects color, but not so elegantly applied.

All of the works in this solo exhibition at the Shirley Cerf Gallery seem to investigate the possibilities of paint within these boundaries. Splay, a large 11'w x 9'h x 6"d

work that moves from yellow to red to green to blue, exposes only one “resultant” box made up of the 18 colors of the painting. The individual sections reveal more tension, created both by the physical rotating arrangement of the Splay, and by the evidence of the different directions of movement in the mixing (or shaking) of the colors. L-Shaped Box contains two different color mixes which meet at the joint of the “L” and then recede backwards into separate tones. This piece testifies to Alpert’s control of the paint, despite the mysterious and random nature of the mixing process.

Ultimately, Alpert’s work is all about color addressed principally as an “idea.” Using Means/Ends as an example, each of his panels and the delicate and finely tuned adjustments of several colors are the “means” of his work. The “ends” are the boxes, the cumulative remnants of the basic colors of the painting. The paintings themselves, however, are the true “ends”- the recording of the process of actions required to physically mix his palette. In effect, each painting is another palette- the physical record of the visual color mix.

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