

WASHINGTON, DC

ROBIN ROSE

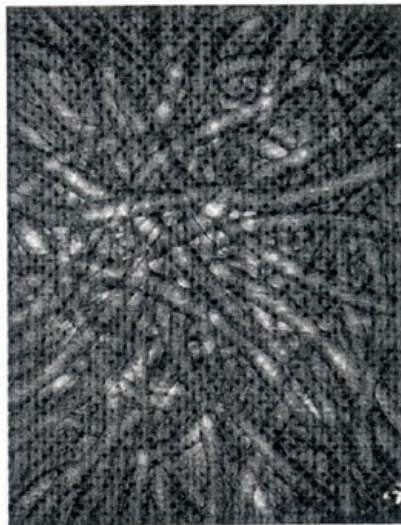
NUMARK GALLERY

The nineteen monochromatic abstractions that comprised Robin Rose's recent show "Exhilarate" are among his most elegant works to date. While the titles are whimsical—*Exonerate*, *Extinct*, *Exuberant*, *Exude*—these encaustic paintings (all 2000) are serious, thoughtful endeavors that deeply probe the medium's expressive possibilities. With their rich, nuanced colors and complex geometric patterns, they stand as the antithesis of the computer-generated abstractions with unmodulated colors and lifeless shapes so popular in painting at the moment.

In his new work, Rose forgoes his usual diptych format of opposed colors and patterns, instead presenting continuous rectilinear fields of a single hue, in this case red. The larger paintings, which range from two to six feet in height, are on linen over aluminum Hexcel panels, while the smaller ones are on wood; all have precise edges and project slightly off the wall, giving a general impression of floating, weightless color. This is especially evident in those works that abjure thick facture in favor of barely perceptible patterns: lines made by what must be a hot palette knife repeatedly drawn across the surface, overlapping rings made by melting circles of pigmented wax. By contrast, the strong textural relief of other works tends to disrupt both surface and color: One large painting has rows of deep horizontal ridges that seem to sag heavily, while in another, it seems as if large triangles are being forced through the waxy surface. By shifting attention to the physical, such works not only trade optical for literal space but undercut the sense of material transcendence, of almost disembodied color that Rose evokes elsewhere.

In the show's best paintings, Rose creates a lustrous surface that remains translucent, allowing underlying geometric patterns to softly emerge. These grids, overlapping circles, and repeated wave forms are carefully calculated to energize the pictorial field while preventing its dissolution into formlessness. In *Excursion*, a pattern of crossing lines angling inward from the sides is mottled in light and dark reds; the grid both fragments and binds the painting together as an activated field of colored units. In some works, grids—usually used as stabilizing devices—are coarsely drawn so they develop a slight wobble; the result is a loosened structure and hence an even more enlivened field. But more than anything else, what makes these works resonate so elegantly is the way Rose layers mineral and metallic pigments into the wax. Subtly reflecting light, these pigments shift the red hue of these works into a range of tints, adding a pronounced silvery tone here, a bright golden red there, a darker burnished copper red elsewhere. The effect has something of the metaphysical about it: The small paintings have a precious, gemlike quality of profound intimacy, and the large works offer a luxuriant luminosity that engulfs the viewer.

—Howard Risatti



Robin Rose, *Extremity*, 2000, encaustic on linen on aluminum panel, 24 x 18".

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