

ARTnews

David Shapiro
Numark Gallery, Washington, DC
Summer 2003

This exhibition of five large-scale acrylic paintings and seven smaller works on paper made it clear why David Shapiro, a 59-year-old New York-based artist, has attracted a considerable following: his abstractions are soothing and hypnotic.

Each work here was divided into a series of adjacent panels featuring one of the motifs Shapiro is best known for – patterns of circles, tangles of squiggly lines, and screenlike grids. Although the panels have the potential to clash, Shapiro's juxtaposition are harmonious, reflecting the cerebral artist's deft touch and mastery of composition, which is influenced in part by Japanese art. They also bring to mind Sean Scully's rectangles and Brice Marsden's stringlike lines.

In *Seer Actor Knower Doer 43* (2002), four panels proceed from left to right with thin horizontal black and blue lines, swirling gray and yellow tangled threads on a pale blue ground, blocks of blue on gray, and, finally, subtly hatched yellow-white crisscrosses on gray. Tranquil from a distance, the textures animate the work's surface up close.

In the acrylic-on-paper *Origin and Return* (2002), Shapiro's panels vary in width, bringing together large black swirls on gray, intricate and tightly connected black tangles on grayish black, a tan orb on white, and an irregularly patterned white grid on a brown ground. This composition has a particular magnetism, a Zen-like quality that draws viewers in.

Considering the repetitiveness of composition and forms, each work was surprisingly different, as Shapiro clearly embraces the challenge of finding new, harmonious combinations within a limited pool of motifs.

-Stephen May

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