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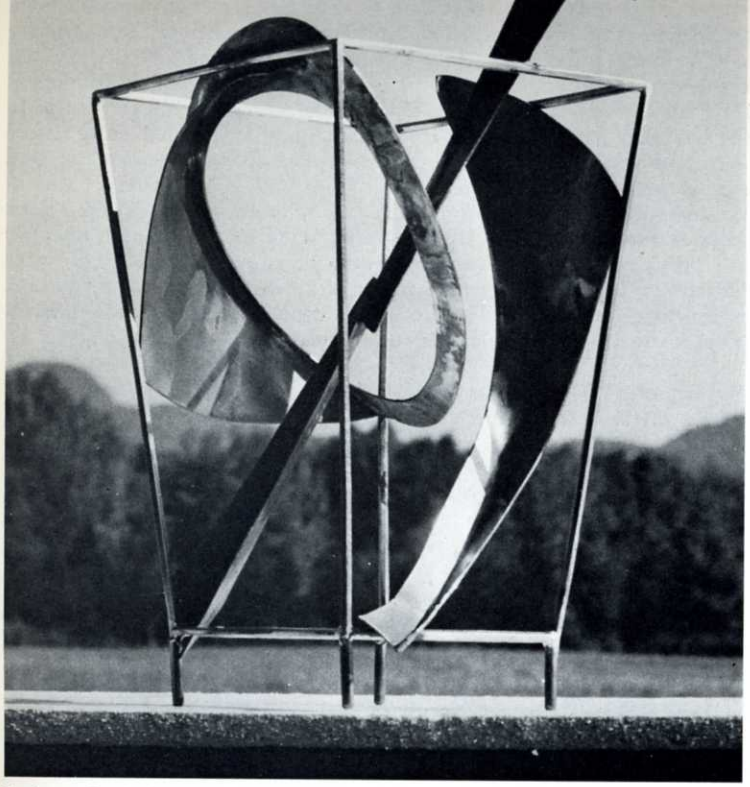


Ferber. *Oval & Triangles in Cage I*, 1970. Copper, height 11¾″. Andre Emmerich Gallery

Ferber. *Newport II*, 1969. Copper, height 39″. Andre Emmerich Gallery

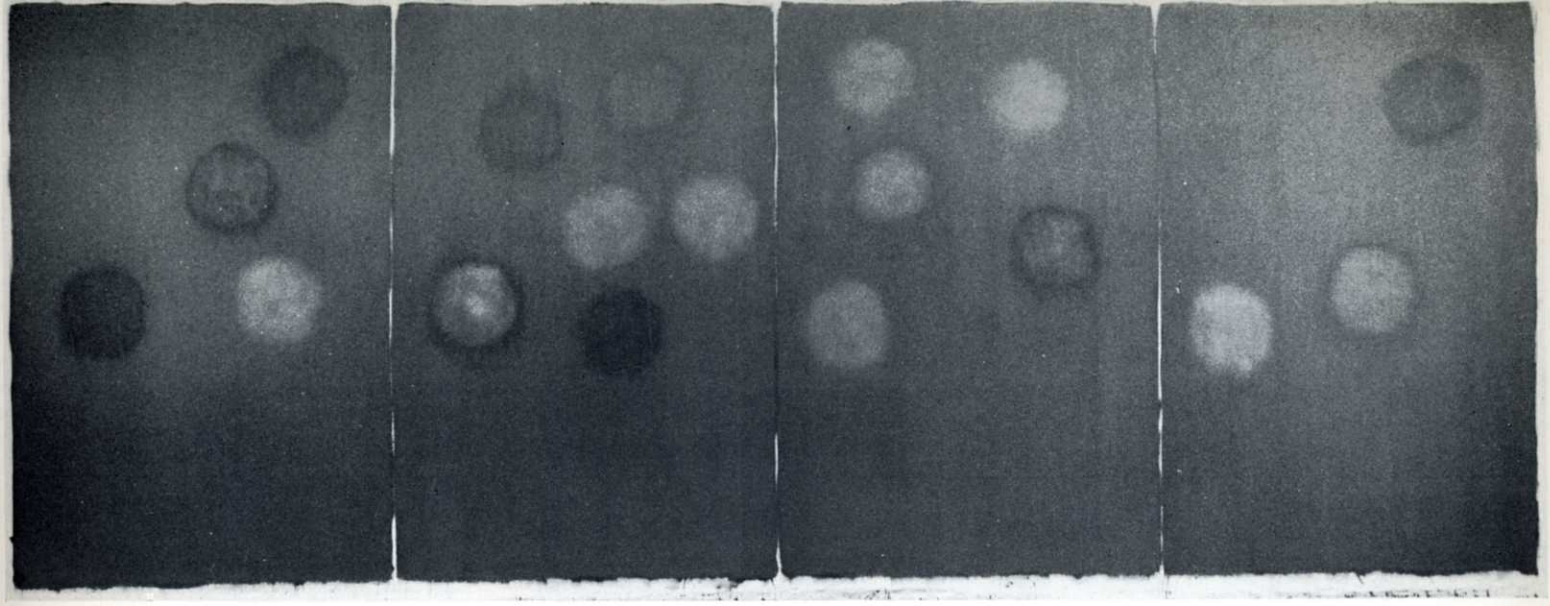
best pieces are like giant doll-houses peopled by pieces of stray moulding, balustrades, columns, and less formalized wooden entities; her technique of spraying the entire mélange in gold gilt (or white, in the case of *Wedding Chapel*) serves to bring the possibilities for stagey illusionism forward to an almost picture-plane like surface, at which dimensional point there *are* no possibilities for illusion. Nevelson's best work is more metaphysical than poetic; it satisfies because it insists on exteriorizing poetic interiors, and it is "deep" because it excavates depths even as they continue to exist.

Herbert Ferber, on the other hand, works in three dimensions; there are no backs to his works. Surprisingly (or perhaps typically) this sculptor is less "successful" (in a non-judgemental sense) with his individual pieces than is Nevelson; it isn't easy to cope with all three dimensions, but it is brave. Unfortunately, Ferber's titles (like Nevelson's) would have his works biting the hand that made them: a name like *Newport* simply doesn't do justice to the elegantly tortuous piece that this work really is. Fortunately the works are true to themselves; one of the delights of good abstract sculpture (and this includes Ferber's) is that it can transfix emotional states in space, making them "real", as it were. Yet it is compulsory that these states conform to at least some of the laws of non-human objects; Ferber goes in for this kind of supreme demeaning of passion by adding jagged, off-kilter "sides" to his swooping and outwards-turning copper strips, so that the fulsome three-dimensional line-in-space is hugged by a kind of afterthought of two-dimensionality. In some of his smaller sculptures expressive copper ovals and triangles beat against the sides of a restraining cage from which they could escape if there were any need to; there is, of course, that need, but it wouldn't exist without the cage, nor would the heroically misshapen ovals and triangles. When you have all the room in the world there's simply no escaping it; eking out a little hard-earned elbow-room in space in the knowledge that space is infinite is, I think, what Ferber's sculpture is all about.

Sam Francis. *Number 5*, 1959. Gouache/paper, 26 × 40″. Martha Jackson Gallery

Sam Francis, a painter who came to the fore during that same forties-fifties period in which Ferber was first making his mark, enjoyed what was called a "mini-retrospective" at Martha Jackson this past month. As the works of the monolithic Abstract Expressionists go almost eagerly to take their place in the art historical parade, Francis continues to dip, drip and fly along into the seventies, free of the constraints of trailblazing brilliance that simultaneously date and elevate the paintings of men like Pollock and de Kooning. Which isn't to say that Francis wasn't an innovator, or that he isn't a great painter; his greatness is just more peculiar than that of the hard-core Abstract Expressionists, a peculiarity which has more obvious precedents than they (Riopelle, late Monet, Bonnard and Matisse), and which, paradoxically enough, doesn't threaten to put an end to the whole on-going artistic process as they do. On the contrary, Francis presages Frankenthaler and Louis, who, in turn, presage contemporary color painting; in each of the succulently beautiful paintings on view in this latest show (which tended to concentrate on those late fifties and sixties works in which freely-applied colors become the air in which the gently pulsing, dominant white background can breathe) could be read a kind of dazzling conviction that things must go on, that "gestural" energy is not all, that there is no end to what can be done with the elements of painting. This ever-so-slightly reactionary conviction is in itself monumental.

As for the presently dominant mode of color painting itself, avatars were everywhere present this month. At Fischbach we saw Doug Ohlson, who has turned away from his former hard-edged excursions to present us with canvases on which rich, deeply smoked color backgrounds give rise to clusters of luminous "sunspots" of various pastel persuasions. At certain points (that is, the points at which these sunspots *are*) the orbs threaten, through sheer force of pink or green, to break away; others tend to be only faintly differentiated from their backgrounds,



Doug Ohlson. *Grey*, 1970. Acrylic/canvas, $7\frac{1}{2} \times 20'$. Fischbach Gallery

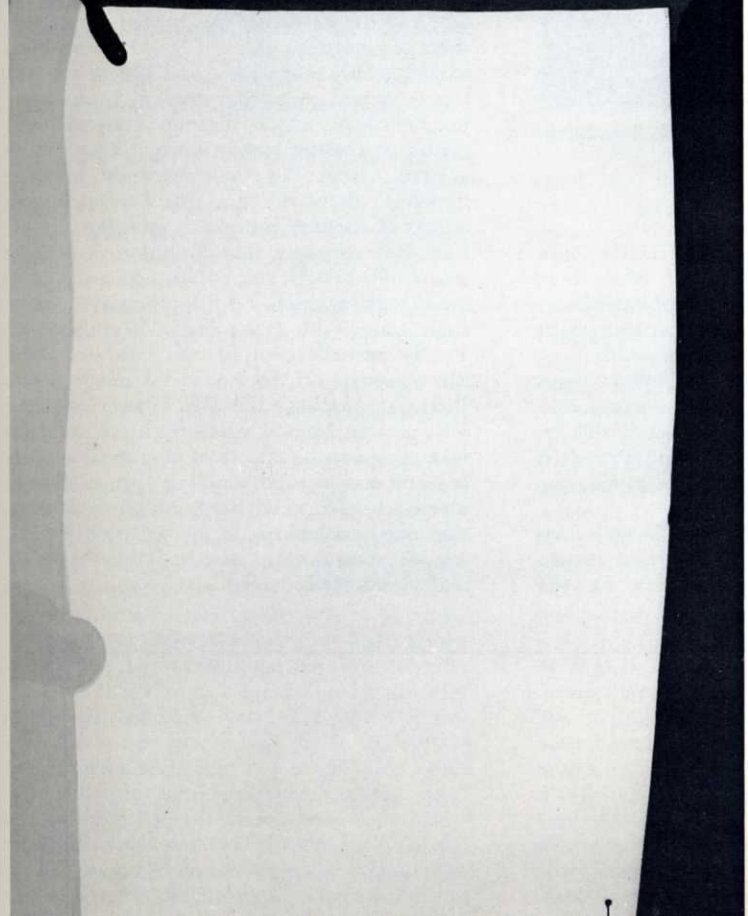
like airy ground swells. Whether they are bright pink or soft brown or violet, however, the tension between the independent status of these pastel orbs and their need for their deeply colored backgrounds is maintained throughout; each sunspot surfaces as an ideal variant of its more general colored element, the effect being similar to that of a sky-blue balloon seen against a storm sky.

Joyce Kozloff had her first one-woman show at Tibor de Nagy this month; this color painter has studied under Theodoros Stamos and Stephen Greene. Each of her works was subdivided from top to bottom into rectangles, these being further subdivided by thin bars of various pale colors and weak outline, and, in some areas, rows of slim, tooth-like triangles. Faintly contrasting colors were adjusted from bar to bar and tooth to tooth; the actual painting technique made the canvases look as if they were coated with some kind of heightened smog. Messiness is appealing, I think, only if it looks more invented than premeditated; an uncertain wash of colors over and within certain defined areas just won't wash and leaves these canvases, indeed, looking as if their formal and coloristic imagery will all wash away in the wash.

John Grillo (de Nagy) showed a series of hot-colored geometries like "God's Eye", in which a pink circle filled with receding (or just smaller and smaller and smaller?) circles and squares is placed on a blue background; or, is that blue background *primary*, with the pink layer of color underneath it, and the blue background opening up like a hole to reveal it? Is the orange square within the pink circle a complete square, or just a border, as it appears to be? Are the corners of the orange border *just* rounded off, as they appear to be, or is it because they underlap the blue background (surface?), hole (circle?)? Are all of these questions as perfectly, relentlessly rhetorical as the kind of painting they refer to? Oh, dear . . .

And a qualified "oh, dear", too, to Darby Bannard's newest color paintings at Larry Rubin's. There is in these works the same kind of dissolving of geometries that makes Grillo's work so conveniently bewildering; this particular dissolution, though, isn't as convenient, since Bannard's paintings are more complex than (if not as complicated as) the former's. He

Sam Francis. *Untitled*, 1965. Oil/canvas, $90\frac{1}{2} \times 66''$. Martha Jackson Gallery



Sam Richardson. *Lift-off cloud*, 1970. Plastic and wood, height $51\frac{1}{2}''$. Martha Jackson Gallery