**ART SPECTRUM**

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CARTER RATCLIFF

**Doug Ohlson at Susan Caldwell**

In his earliest paintings, Ohlson used hard-edges to bring his colors into contact with each other. The variations of hard-edged patterns on the surfaces of his canvases led to variations in the shapes of the canvases themselves. At the extreme point of this development, Ohlson’s paintings were made of tall, thin panel-like canvases joined together vertically. These works were like walls, all the more so because they were sometimes made to turn corners. His paintings enclose space, not sculpturally but in the manner of architecture. Then, several seasons back, Ohlson returned to canvases of more traditional proportions, which he hung on the wall in the traditional way. Along with this change went an abandonment of hard edges. The artist’s color appeared in large, more or less circular bursts of sprayed paints. He would give each shape a discrete, intelligible place within an overall color pattern. The result of these clear placements was that the blurred edges of his circles did not lead to indeterminateness. Color was just as self-evidently secure as when he employed hard edges. Sprayed blurriness – blurriness in fact – read as radiant brightness. The facts were overcome. This ability to turn the actual characteristics of his surfaces back on themselves is what has made Ohlson’s recent paintings so impressive. In his current show, the discreteness and the resulting intensity of his color-shapes remains. However, the paradox – the transcendence of the facts of the surface – has been deepened. The chief fact of the matter is that his circles with their blurred edges now often touch. In addition, they are all the same color within on painting and are placed against backgrounds of a very similar hue. In certain cases the circles overlap. Yet Ohlson’s shapes, hence his colors, maintain their discreteness, hence their intensity. If anything, the willingness to risk the possibility that actual blurriness will become pictorial blurriness gives these works new power. The circles float in shallow space, jostling one another slightly. Each one has its own clear but extremely complex place on the surface. This means a painting’s dominant color dominates in fact through repetition, but in effect – and the effect is usually dazzling – it dominates through the richness of the variety with which it presents itself.

Reproduction;

Ohlson. *Black*, 1974 Oil, 78’” x 85”. Susan Caldwell.