

Myriad approaches by exploring spirits

Diana Freedman

Well, if you're expecting another article on 'diversity in the art world' you're in for a surprise. This writer is going to point out trends where you thought there weren't any. And not just to make a point! Because most serious artists do acknowledge their influences and recognize the negative element of fashion in today's scene. So—in each of the following exhibitions, what is most outstanding is the integrity of so many of these artists, whether in combining traditions, or following a single path to make a statement.

Grid paintings undergo a unique transformation in the work of Sumiye Okoshi, at Viridian Gallery, 52 West 57 Street, from October 20 through November 7. Oriental calligraphic brushstrokes and Western "op" painting work together in highly structured but exuberant works where the element of chance is emphasized by the very use of a grid.

Small ellipses of rice paper, stained, splattered, and brushed with color, are arranged in careful rows on a colored background. In a large work like "Plenum 83," the ellipses group into irregular shapes and bands of color, offering a glimpse of rhythms and variations within a large field. In the small squares, the nuances within the ovals that are lined up on a metallic background build up to a metaphor for variations within a single form. Through abstract means, Okoshi invents a form that reveals her reverence for nature.

Sumi-e paintings of Koho (Yamamoto), at the Open Center, 83 Spring Street, through December 6, reveal the artist's mastery of an attitude. These spontaneous black ink and watercolor pieces are Zen in their approach, requiring utmost concentration. Their expressive range depends on the density of the ink, the thickness and thinness of each stroke, and the balance between empty silent space and active painted areas—issues that concerned abstract expressionists and action painters.

In "Untitled I," two rich black forms collide, behind which colored stains emerge. "Untitled IV" utilizes more white space, and energy is carefully controlled in strokes of varying thickness and density. The Sumi-e language of markings can also describe "Crows," "Archangels," and "Bamboo." Within her tradition, Koho explores the infinite possibilities of calligraphic painting, making Sumi-e accessible to us.

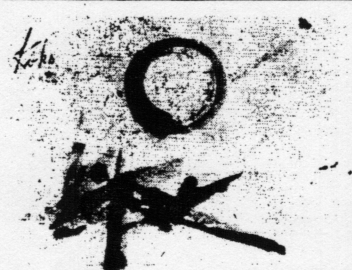
At Phoenix Gallery, 568 Broadway, through October 24, **Janneka Hannay**



Sumiye Okoshi, "Plenum #82," Viridian Gallery



Janneka Hannay, "Dancing Doors," Phoenix Gallery



Koho, untitled, New York Open Center, photo D. James Dee

shows dynamic abstract paintings that combine expressionist techniques of staining, dripping, dragging a brush over a surface, and squeezing paint straight from the tube with geometric elements. Stained neutral backgrounds contrast with areas of bright vermilion and cerise that are often used to define a rectangle or become a luscious glob of paint that remains on the painting's surface. These shapes are often subtly echoed in paler tones creating a taut multi-layered space. There is a surprising unity and a richness in effects in the work where the layers interact.



Kiyoshi Iwasa, "Angel and Ward," Westbeth Artists and Friends



Elizabeth Ryan, A.W.S., untitled, Pen and Brush

In "Dancing Doors," black, red, and neutral rectangles tilt away from each other, creating movement. In "Crescendo" a blue arc contrasts with the straight-edged elements. There is nothing glib about Hannay's paintings. In fact our excitement comes from losing ourselves,

along with the artist, in the many stains, drips, marks and shapes of the work, and then Janneka Hannay sensitively pulls it all together.

The capable paintings, sculpture, prints, photographs and drawings in "Westbeth Artists and Friends," at Westbeth Gallery, 55 Bethune Street, through October 25, demonstrate how much can be achieved by artists pursuing a single path. It reminds one that something well done is always exciting, regardless of what fashion dictates.

Charles Kaiman's "Baci Box" treats the surfaces of foil, wicker, brass, glass, and cloth with the same care as a Dutch master, albeit with modern brushstrokes. In Ralph Dubin's painting, "Ritual," the artist explores the interplay between abstract forms, those suggesting carved surfaces and subtly toned background surfaces.

Marjorie Rubin's "Raspberry Parfait" is a playful drawing of confetti color combined with line, suggesting the figure, superimposed on a linear grid. Richard Castellana's "Interior" and "Yellow Still-life" make use of bold pattern, flattened forms and the effect of color upon color. Toni Dalton's "Mollie" shows how far one can go with a richly painted surface. I could go on....

The Fall Watercolor Exhibition at the Pen and Brush, 16 East 10 Street, through October 13, offers a diverse group of work whose sole common denominator is the medium. Watercolor requires much discipline and all of the artists here are in control of their craft.

Lucia Salemmé's "Tangerine Summer" combines line drawing with brilliant reds, and orange stains and washes. "Ice Flow" by Peggy Bunnell is a simplified landscape of the moon and blocky cakes of ice in a river. Catherine Turk Ballantyne's "Below the Mountain" is oriental in its treatment of scale; an overwhelming mountain dwarfs the trees below.

"Artist's Tractor" by Margery Soroka becomes a composition of brown and gold abstract stains and lines which suggest this machinery. M.L.H. Carver's "Tu-reen" is a still-life in which energetic strokes of color create a bright sparkling image.

In solos by Okoshi, Koho and Hannay or in work by the many artists at Westbeth and Pen and Brush, the myriad approaches to making art are apparent, and one sees how successful an artist can be if he explores a set of problems in depth. If all of the artists reviewed here are pursuing different paths, their search is manifest in works that are neither faddish nor glib.