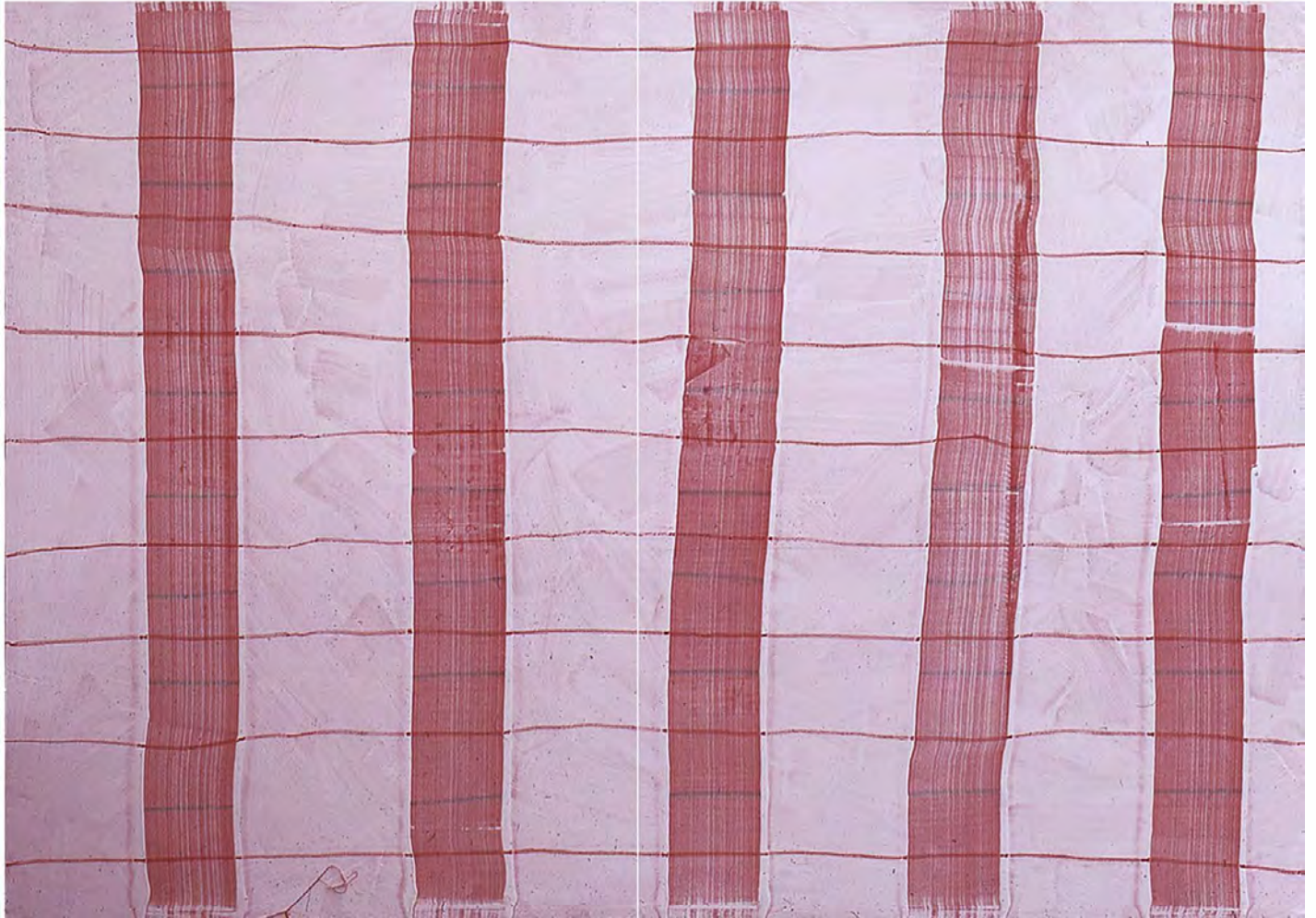


Thomas Erben Gallery

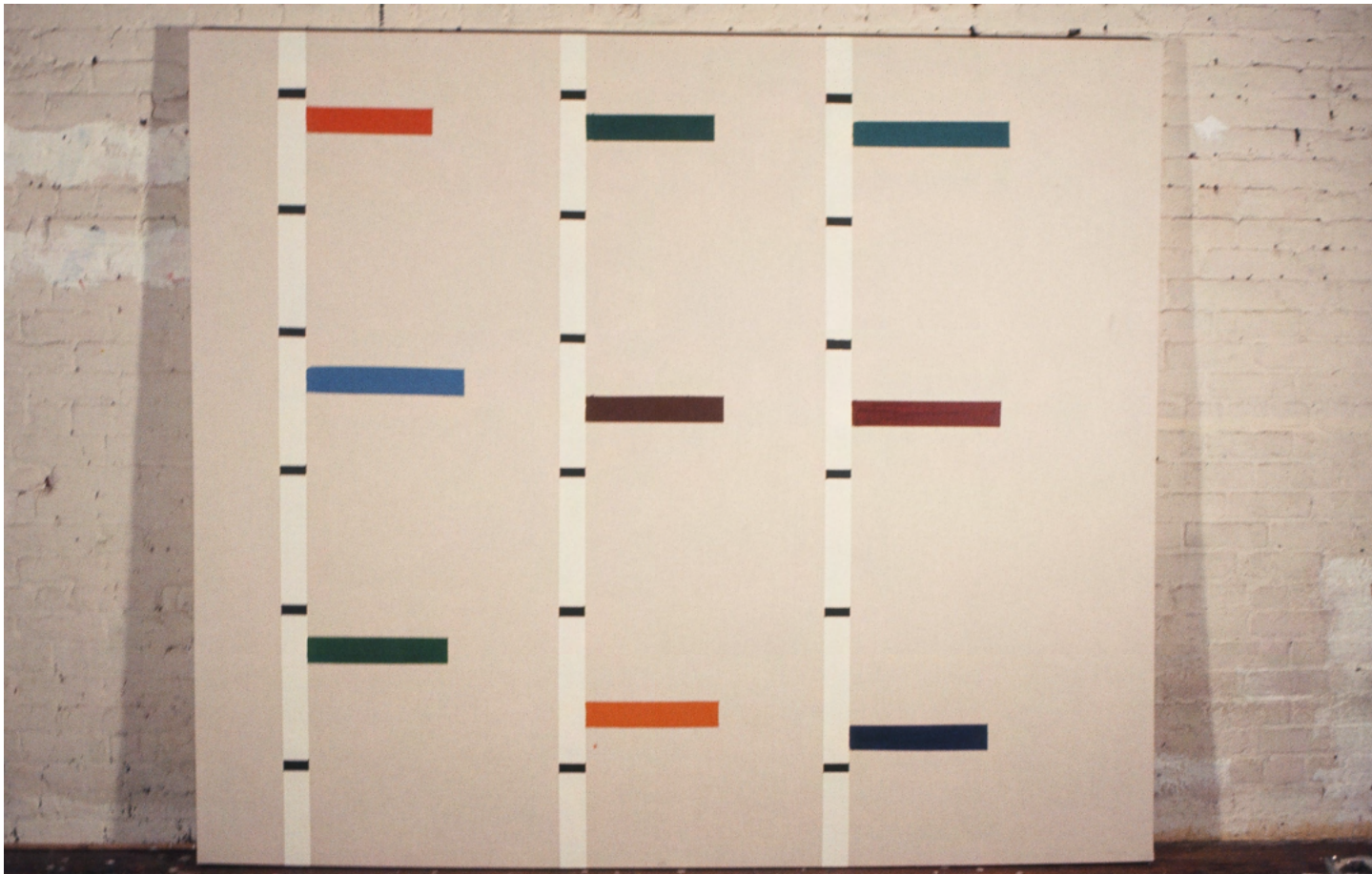
Harriet Korman

1969-2014

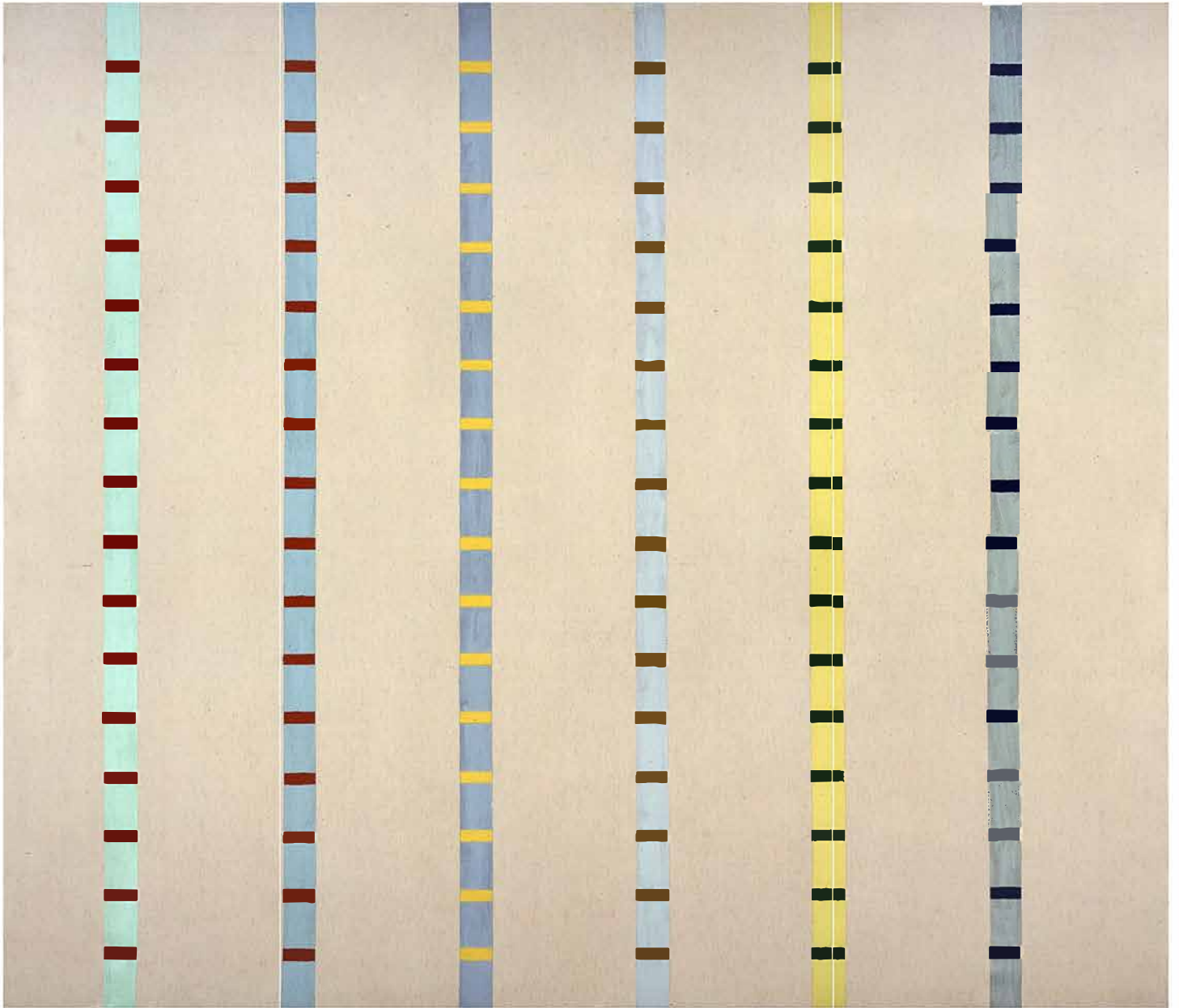
526 West 26th Street, floor 4
New York, NY 10001
212.645.8701
www.thomaserben.com
info@thomaserben.com



Untitled, 1969. Gesso and crayon on dyed canvas, 60 x 84 in.



Untitled, 1970. Acrylic on unprimed canvas, 72 x 84 in.

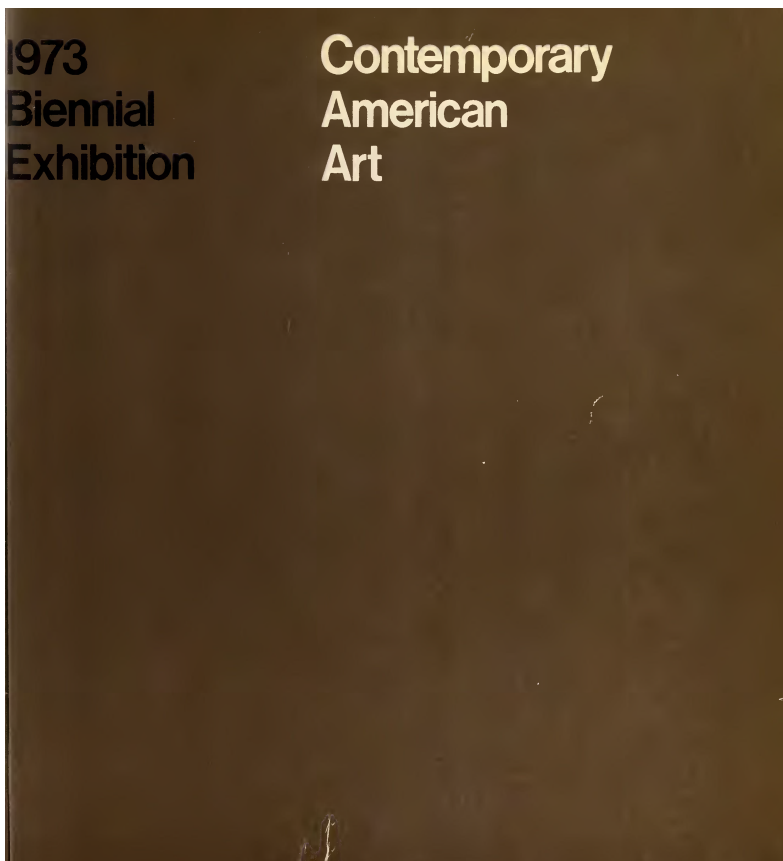


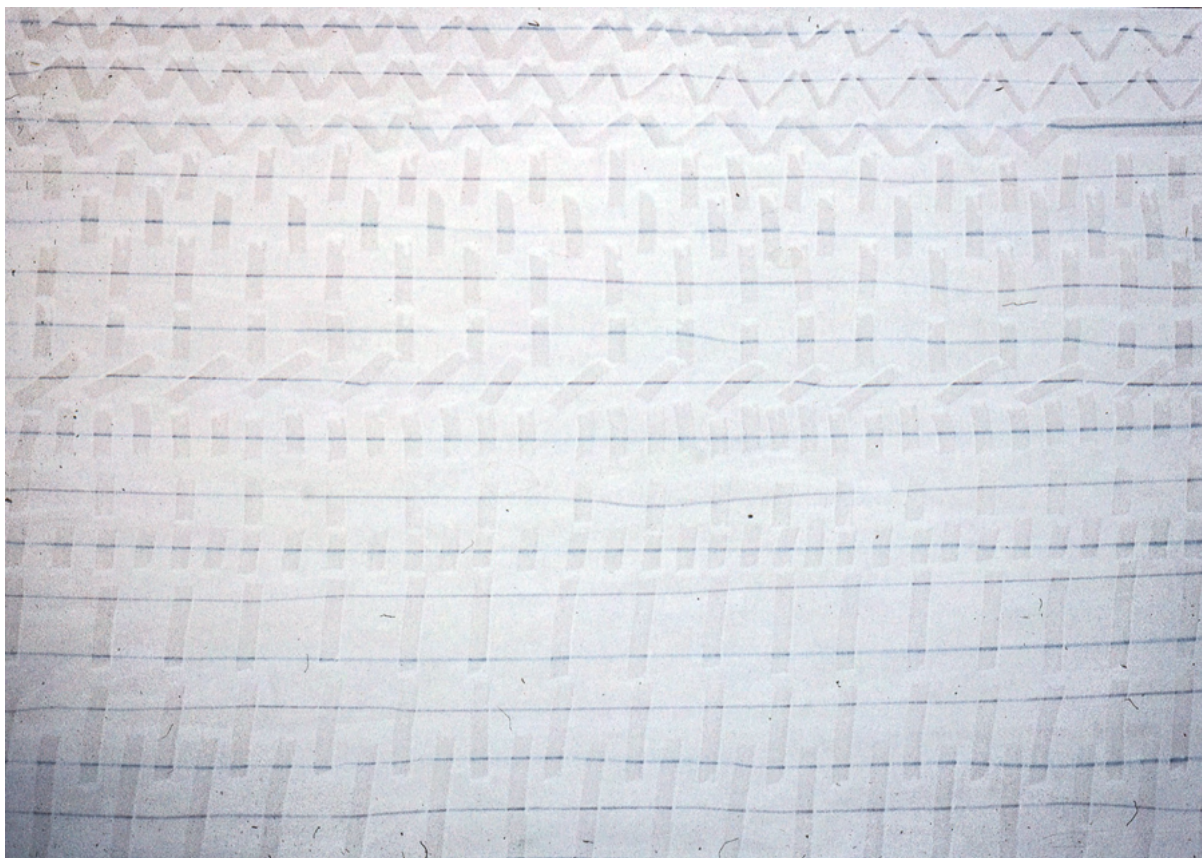
Untitled, 1970. Acrylic on unprimed canvas, 72 x 84 in.



1972 Whitney Annual

1973 Whitney Biennial





HARRIET KORMAN is about thirty; her first one-woman show was at LoGiudice in the fall of 1972. This second show is good, one of this year's best in its own modest, youthful way. Korman's paintings are very simple. What's amazing about them is not that she does so much with so little but that she does much with so little with such nonchalance. And the nonchalance isn't a negative quality, because the results aren't sloppy or insubstantial.

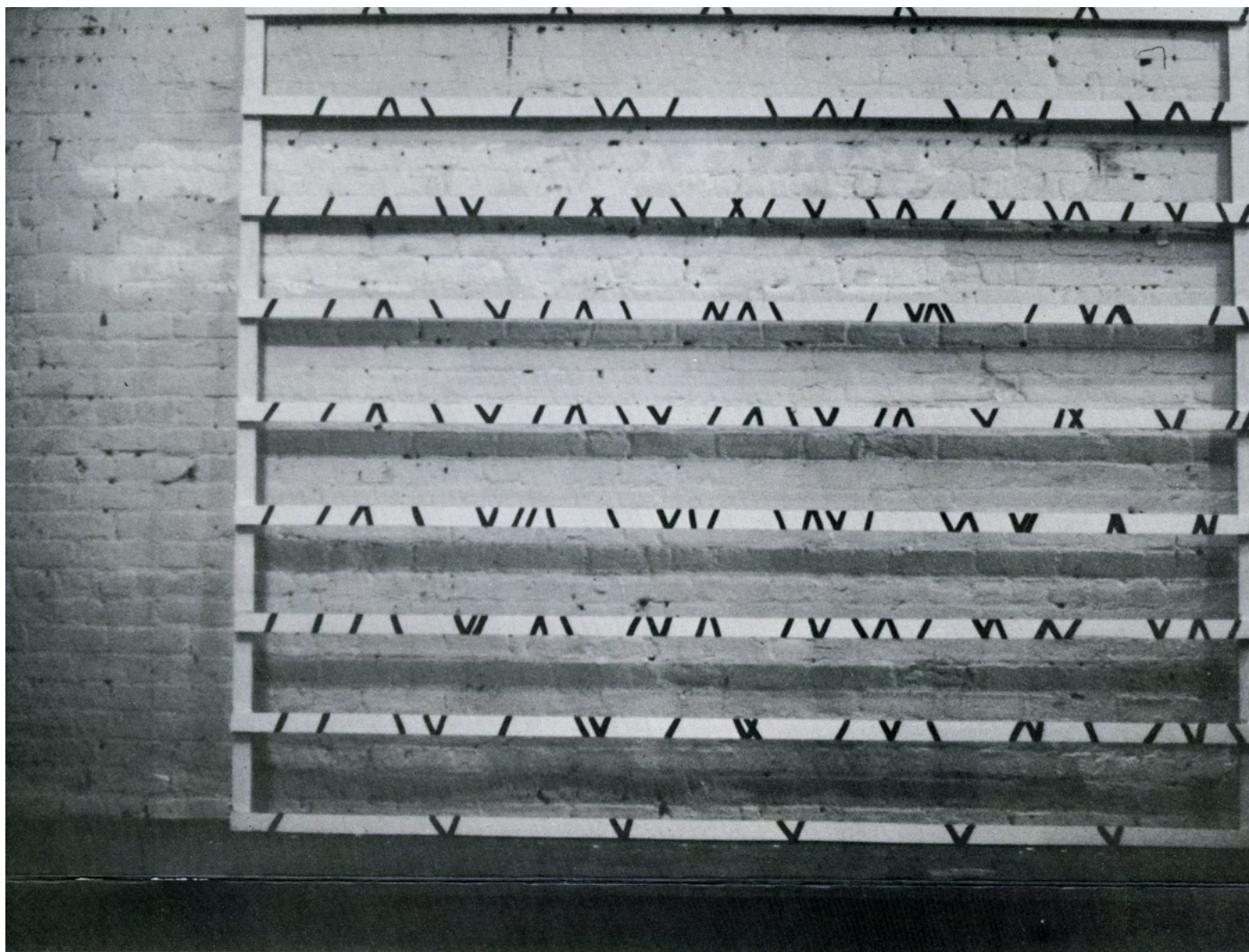
Korman's method is immediately apparent. She goes over the surface of each painting three times: first she makes a series of horizontal lines a few inches apart, alternating blue and black crayon. Then she covers the surface with one coat of white paint, thin enough that the lines show through. Finally she marks along the crayon lines with a palette knife, scraping off

patches of the white paint. The first two layers are connected, brought together by the third, which is simply a process of removal and not a layer of material in itself. But the scraping marks are crude and emphatic; ironically, they are more substantial than the material they cut through. The marks are random, the most nonchalant part of the process. Sometimes they are fairly regular along each line. But often they shift from a staccato to connected zig-zag, to wavy line. They remain vertical or spread on a diagonal slant; they lengthen or shorten. Korman works within a predetermined system, but completes her surfaces with a certain disregard for this system; the process itself makes the system more flexible than one would expect. The paintings are not reworked or corrected; "good" and "bad" marks appear on the same surfaces. If Kor-

man seems indifferent in her changing marks and lines, the point she makes is that individually they don't matter much. Her method is blatant and flimsy but it's the final, combined effect that she's after.

That effect is not flimsy; the layers and marks fluctuate—like breathing—between fragility and robustness. This pulsation pulls you toward them and holds the attention. So finally, after the speed and nonchalance, Korman's abstraction is concerned with a contemplative stasis. In this she is probably indebted to Agnes Martin, but her work is denser and not as taut. And Korman's touch is confident and inattentive where Martin's is often painstakingly cautious. Given the pervasive influence of Martin's work, Korman is one of the few painters to have taken it an independent step further.

Roberta Smith, Art Forum, 1975



HARRIET KORMAN

Paintings

CLAIRE S. COPLEY GALLERY
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Preview Saturday May 18 - 11 am - 5 pm

VARIATIONS ON GRIDS

San Francisco / Robert McDonald

"Painting is dead" is an idea whose time will never come for Harriet Korman. Painting is what painters do, and as long as there are painters painting there will be painting. I do not know that Korman would agree with this formulation, but I feel that she would, for Korman is admittedly a traditionalist. She is comfortable with the conventional forms of art and the limitations that they impose. Within them she finds freedom for innovation. Structures, she feels, give form to and stimulate the growth of inchoate thoughts and feelings. Implicit in these attitudes is Korman's humanism: painting is a medium by which the artist communicates with others.

Now on exhibition at the Daniel Weinberg Gallery are five paintings and five drawings by Harriet Korman. The paintings, like those she exhibited two years ago at Weinberg, are "white paintings," lyrical abstractions that she makes with canvas, crayon and gesso within a grid format. I have heard comments that the grid is a hackneyed convention, yet many artists, and not least Korman, have made strong, distinctive, personal statements using that format.

During a talk at the San Francisco Art Institute, Korman commented in response to a questioner in the audience that she would probably continue to work with grids because she sees grids everywhere. Her grids, however, are not the precisely drafted grids of graph paper. They are, rather, combinations of gestural horizontal and vertical lines that form patterns like loosely woven fiberworks. The freedom that Korman seeks within limitations is immediately visible: the concept of a grid, which is, after all, a concept chosen by the artist, guides her hand, but the hand wavers and wanders, though ever so slightly. The result is a compromise between the idea and the body, and Korman's recent "white paintings" may be seen as paradigms of the compromise between the spirit and the flesh, a major theme of human culture.

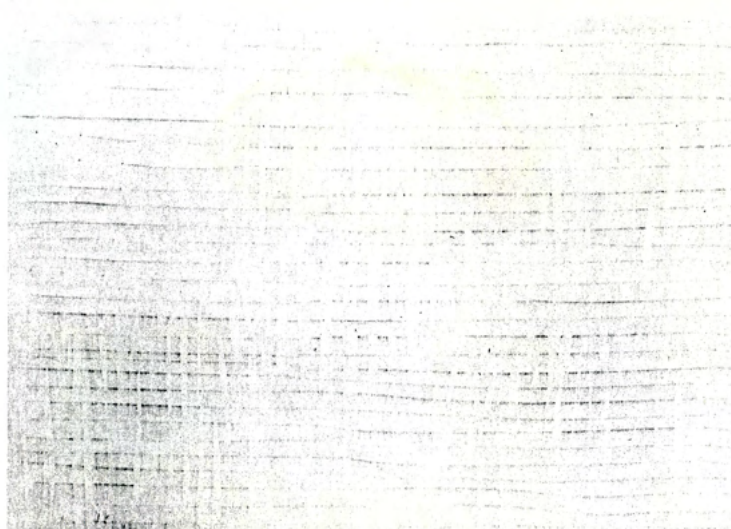
To make her works Korman draws horizontal lines with crayon, most often blue, on raw canvas. She then

covers the surface, usually 5'x 7', with a thin layer of gesso and, working as quickly as possible, scrapes vertical bands (about one inch wide) at desired intervals with a piece of wood. Three of the works at the Weinberg Gallery are fairly regular grids, differing from one another in their tightness or looseness according to the number of horizontal and vertical lines combined. They are subtle works whose white vertical bands seem to move sinuously like fabric in soft breezes or underwater plants in gentle currents. The fourth work differs from the others in the intervals of its horizontal lines, which appear in pairs separated by spaces, so that overall the format resembles a plaid. This work, with its more complex rhythmic pattern, I found to be especially exhilarating.

Korman's newest exhibited work is closely related

to the others, yet it differs from them wildly. While the horizontal lines are fairly regular, the vertical bands resemble white flames flickering over the surface. On the left there are thin, scraped, eccentric lines, and toward the middle at the top there is a diagonally scraped area. Whether by design or not, an X appears in the work. Korman's pencil and chalk drawings on display generally express the same sort of wildness as this latest work. They are irregular, experimental and improvisatory, but still coherent.

A woman in a poem by Amy Lowell, upon learning that her lover has been killed in battle, cries out in her grief, protesting the social conventions that frustrated their happiness, "My God! What are patterns for?" Korman, I feel, would respond that they give strength to ideas and feelings. They help to make life, including grief, bearable, and art possible. □



HARRIET KORMAN: UNTITLED, 1977, gesso and crayon on canvas, 5'x 7', at the Daniel Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: Roger Gass.



Untitled, 1978. Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 in.



Untitled, 1970. Oil on canvas, 60 x 84 in.



HARRIET KORMAN (Willard): During the past three years Korman has left the cool, meditative bamboo groves of her paintings of the middle 1970s and has begun to explore hotter, more raucous chromatic and rhythmic climates.

In some of the canvases here she has, whether consciously or not, ventured into the territory of semistructured, semispontaneous painting that was opened up in the 1950s by such second-generation Abstract Expressionists as Bradley Walker Tomlin and Jack Tworkov. Most importantly, however, in her uneven bands of rich color and her vaguely calypso beat she has picked up where Frank Stella left off in 1958-59 when he abandoned the controlled painterliness of his *Delta* and *Luncheon on the Grass* in favor of the stark rigor of his black paintings.

One painting that stood out amidst the diversity of Korman's show was entitled *Figure Sleeping*. Its barely representational forms and strong earth colors, seen as if through a sultry haze, evoked Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria, where the air carries brick dust and the scent of lemons. In art-historical terms, this haunting painting, which is something of an anomaly in Korman's abstract oeuvre, calls to mind both the flat stylizations of Coptic art and the nascent abstraction of Vuillard's *In Bed*.

A group of small paintings in the show ranged from an Arp-like amoeboid composition to a lyrically arching blue-and-white abstract landscape and beyond that to a breezily brushed seascape. It is to the credit of the artist and her dealer that they let us see a body of work so full of intelligent risk-taking and exploration. Korman, at this point in her life, gives the lie to Picasso's dictum that art is about finding rather than about seeking.

—Richard Whelan

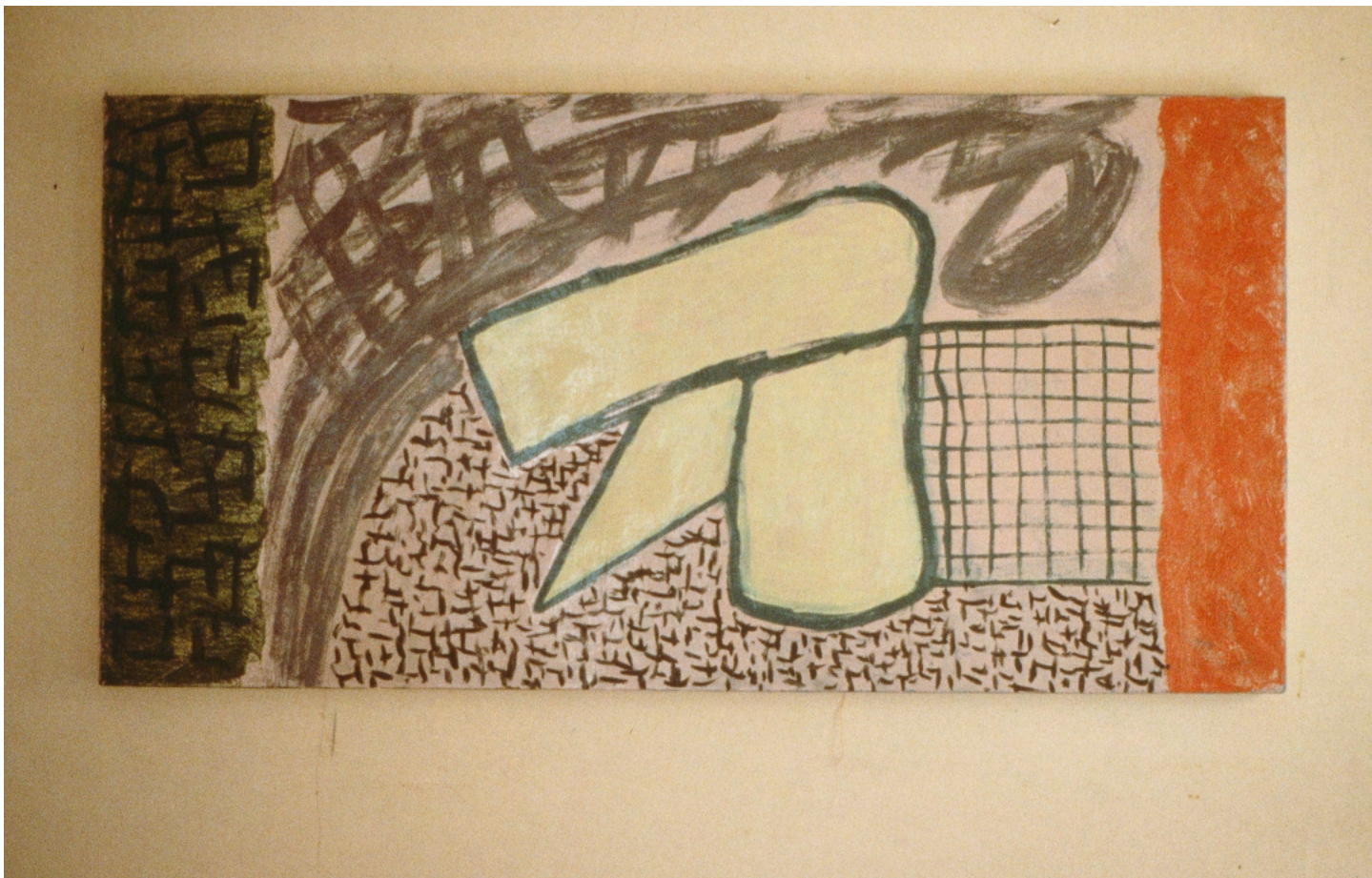
Harriet Korman,
Figure Sleeping,
1979, oil on canvas,
42 by 60 inches.
Willard.



Untitled, 1984. Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in.



Untitled, 1984. Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in.



Untitled, 1986. Oil on canvas, 24 x 48 in.



Untitled, 1989. Oil on canvas, 72 x 84 in.



Harriet Korman: *Untitled*, 1989, oil on canvas, 60 by 60 inches; at Sorkin.

them off, has many analogies in the work of Tápies and Fontana. And lest we think we have a fix on this artist's work, some recent carpets made from Bogart's designs that I saw at Sophie Van Moerkerke in Brussels struck a strangely hip, almost Neo-Geo chord.

—Brooks Adams

Harriet Korman at Sorkin

Like a good dance performance, Harriet Korman's painting combines skill with an instinctive grace. Her naturalness—evidenced primarily in a fleet, wet-on-wet, off-the-cuff paint application, but also in her inclination at certain points in her career to move casually among styles—has made the work a little hard to bring into critical focus.

Korman's paintings in the '70s, mostly in black or blue and white, involved drawing linear marks on the canvas, painting over them, then scraping back to reveal them again. Despite this ostensibly labor-intensive process, the pigment was so fluidly handled that the paintings looked like they might have been executed in a single sitting. By the '80s Korman was experimenting with livelier color and putting a lot of pressure on her deliberately slender pictorial means—buckling her grid-based linear patterns

into taut curves and so on—without, however, abandoning an essentially calligraphic style.

Korman's new work draws several of these features into cooperation, and the paintings in her recent solo show looked hand-somely of a piece. Most of them begin with a monochromatic ground built up of several layers of color, traces of which can be seen at the edges or swelling up from beneath: in one instance a grayed-down flesh pink derives its complexity from underlying coats of blood red and dark blue. Onto these fields Korman typically lays down spaced-apart individual dashes or wavy strokes of contrasting colors. On the rich mustard-colored ground of one painting, for example, she marks a kind of interior frame with four tapering strokes and on top of that floats a dozen or so horizontal lines of orange, red and purple. Together they give the impression of a grid drifting gently apart before our eyes. The fact that Korman is effectively transforming her own past by turning Minimalism's signature configuration into something as tactile and fresh as fine textile design is admirable, yet the real attraction of the new work is found in its formal qualities: in the sweet-and-sour colors, in the expressive range of her compositions, at once languid and peremptory,

and, perhaps most of all, in the suspenseful little dance that brush and canvas perform, barely touching here, in full contact there, under her light, confident hand.

—Holland Cotter

Harriet Korman at Lennon, Weinberg

Harriet Korman, who has been exhibiting regularly in New York since the early '70s, operates in the gap between painterly hedonism and formal puritanism. Working with brushes of various sizes on medium-to-large canvases, Korman applies paint with a deliberately artless directness in all sorts of ways: in translucent veils, opaque swatches, gestural snarls and calligraphic scrawls. The results are airy, layered, grid-based abstractions that at first seem driven entirely by the pleasure principle.

The largest piece in this show was an untitled 7-by-12-foot diptych. As do the other five works exhibited, this one leaves frankly evident the process by which it was made. A violet field is covered by a network of short, wide-brush strokes of light yellow. Over this are a number of localized passages: a rectangle of solid pink in the upper left corner; a broader, brushy area of ocher across the rest of the top; two rectangles of opaque pale yellow down the right side; a thicket of feathery red strokes juxtaposed with a small green square at the bottom. The whole is a lusciously vibrant, architectonically structured interplay of complementary hues and gestural rhythms and an engaging record of the artist's absorption in the controlled spontaneity of improvisatory painting. Freedom and pleasure are strictly contained, however, as concentration on the empirical facts of paint and process is secured by a spartan denial of emotional expression or metaphorical

imagination.

In another, 6-by-7-foot picture, a square expanse of pale yellow is framed by a border of diversely painted rectangles. From a distance, the yellow square may seem to dematerialize into a sunny haze; there is, indeed, a Bonnard-like radiance about the painting. Moving closer, though, you find that these hints of illusionism are flatly contradicted by the paint quality. Darker, underpainted rectangles are visible through the pasty yellow film, and bright yellow hatchmarks are randomly painted over it. There is far more concrete surface than fictive space to this painting.

Korman makes undeniably elegant, impeccably composed paintings. But intensely alive though she is to the perceptual aspects of painting, her work nevertheless seems stifled by her self-imposed limitations. Tension between impulsive sensuality and ascetic formality may be the necessary generative condition of her art, but one can't help wondering what might happen were Korman to bend her purist rules to permit some more imaginative and adventurous possibilities. —Ken Johnson

Art in America, November 1994

Harriet Korman: Untitled, 1993, oil on canvas, diptych, 84 by 144 inches; at Lennon, Weinberg.

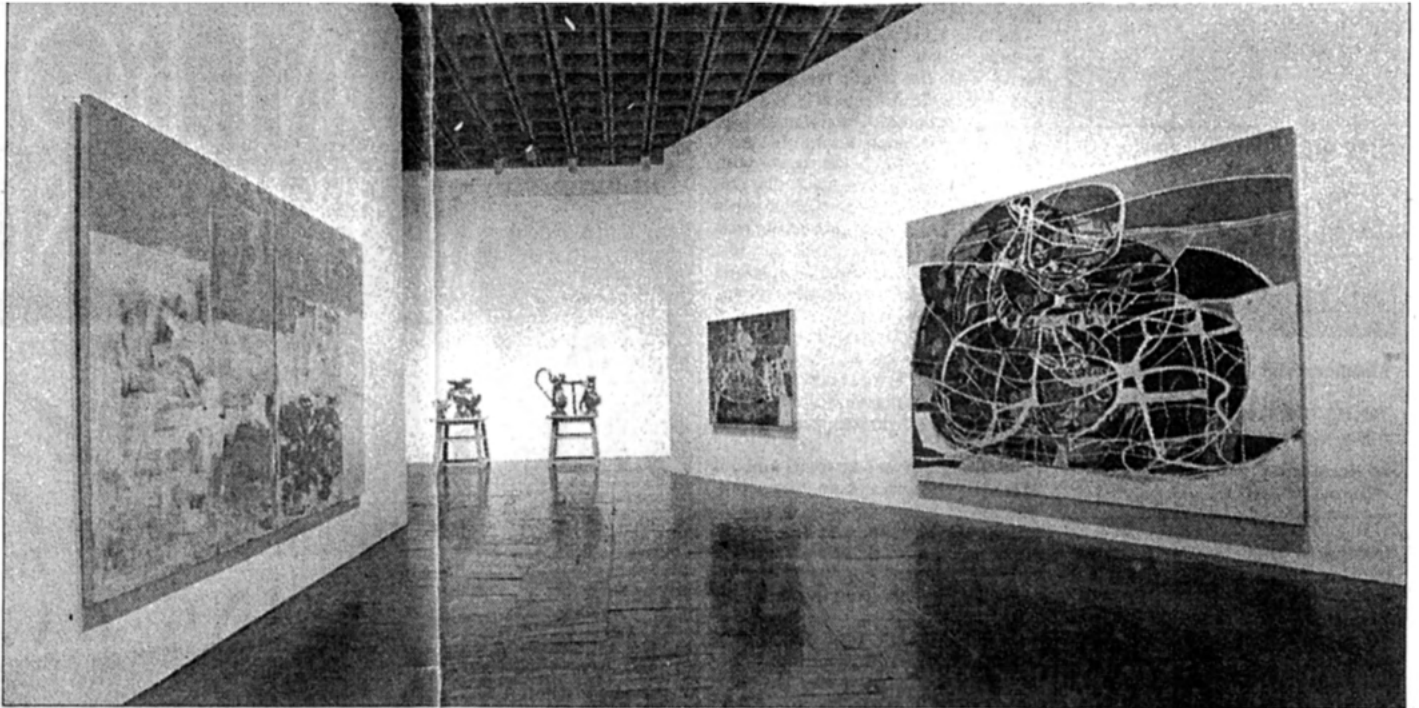




1995 BIENNIAL EXHIBITION

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 1995

A Quirky Whitney Biennial



Photographs by Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

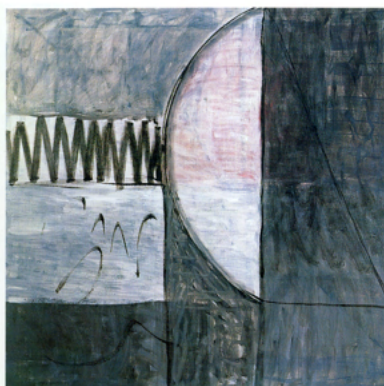
Connections within categories: Harriet Korman's gestural painting, left, faces two densely layered abstractions by Terry Winters at the Whitney.



Untitled, 1996. Oil on linen, 78 x 78 in.



Harriet Korman: New Paintings



opens Thursday October 17, 6-8pm
continues through November 16, 1996



LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.
560 Broadway, Suite 308 New York, New York 10012
Tel. 212 941 0012 Fax. 212 941 0098

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1996

Art in Review

Harriet Korman

Lennon, Weinberg
560 Broadway, at Prince Street
SoHo
Through Nov. 16

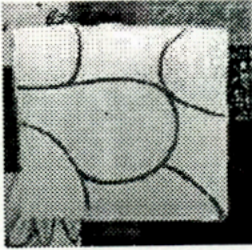
Throughout her career, Harriet Korman has seemed to accept and then to deny her rather calligraphically oriented talent as a painter, producing works that alternate between enviable ease and forced awkwardness. Her latest works, nine untitled canvases from the last two years, show her combining these two proclivities. This is probably a good idea, but so far the results feel transitional and mixed, ranging from edgy to just plain grating.

In these mostly black, white and gray works, Ms. Korman is compartmentalizing the drifting thatches of repeating brush strokes that come so naturally to her hand, boxing off different marks and configurations (a figure-eight motif, for example) into big irregular grids.

When there is a sense of contained looseness, as in the painting nearest the gallery door, this works fine, with a quiet, burgeoning sense of power. But sometimes, as in the second work from the door, the contained elements are already tightly defined, and the effect is strained and dry. In the best painting in the show, Ms. Korman seems to lay a big white handkerchief, subdivided by loose gray curves, over the compartments. In some ways the two sides of her sensibility are furthest apart here, yet they collaborate the most convincingly.

ROBERTA SMITH

lumpy surface protrusions and disintegrating skins of paint. Their vivid combination of virtuality, psychedelia, hysteria and wit make them perfect images for New York in 1996.

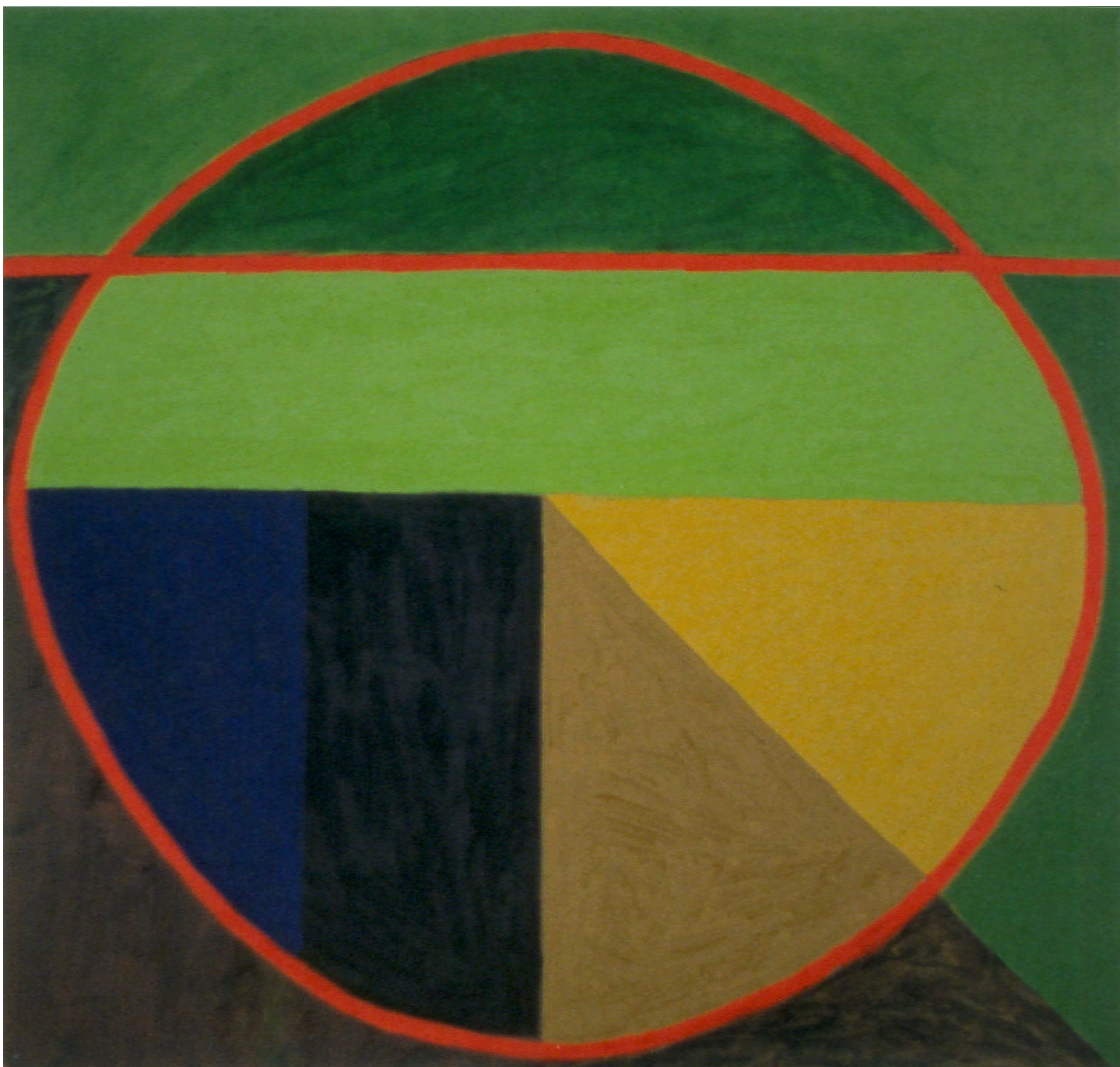


Harriet Korman,
Untitled, 1995,
oil on linen,
72 x 72 in.

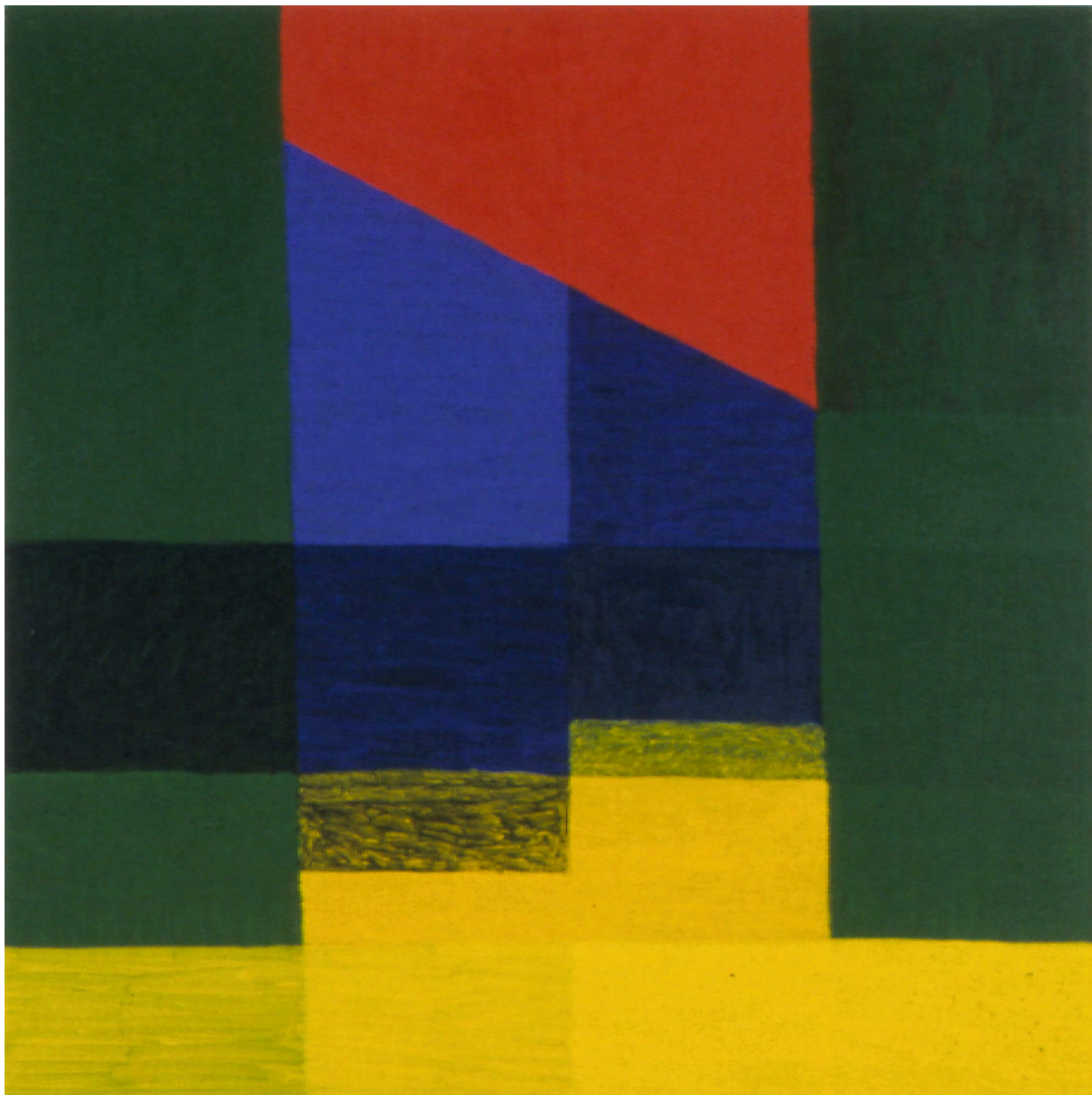
Harriet Korman at Lennon, Weinberg

Oct. 15-Nov. 16, 1996

In these white, gray and black paintings a kind of rough geometry prevails. Somber and elegiac, they make order from the structuring of gestural brushstrokes. That order yields zones that hold all manner of visual energy: restive, flickering, coiled, sprung. Although often pictographic with a sign-like rhetoric, these paintings resist being read. They are instead abstract situations, dominated by acts of weaving, dividing and locking together. These large-scale works don't want to be about anything else; rather they aspire to be raw and elegant figures of painterly speech.



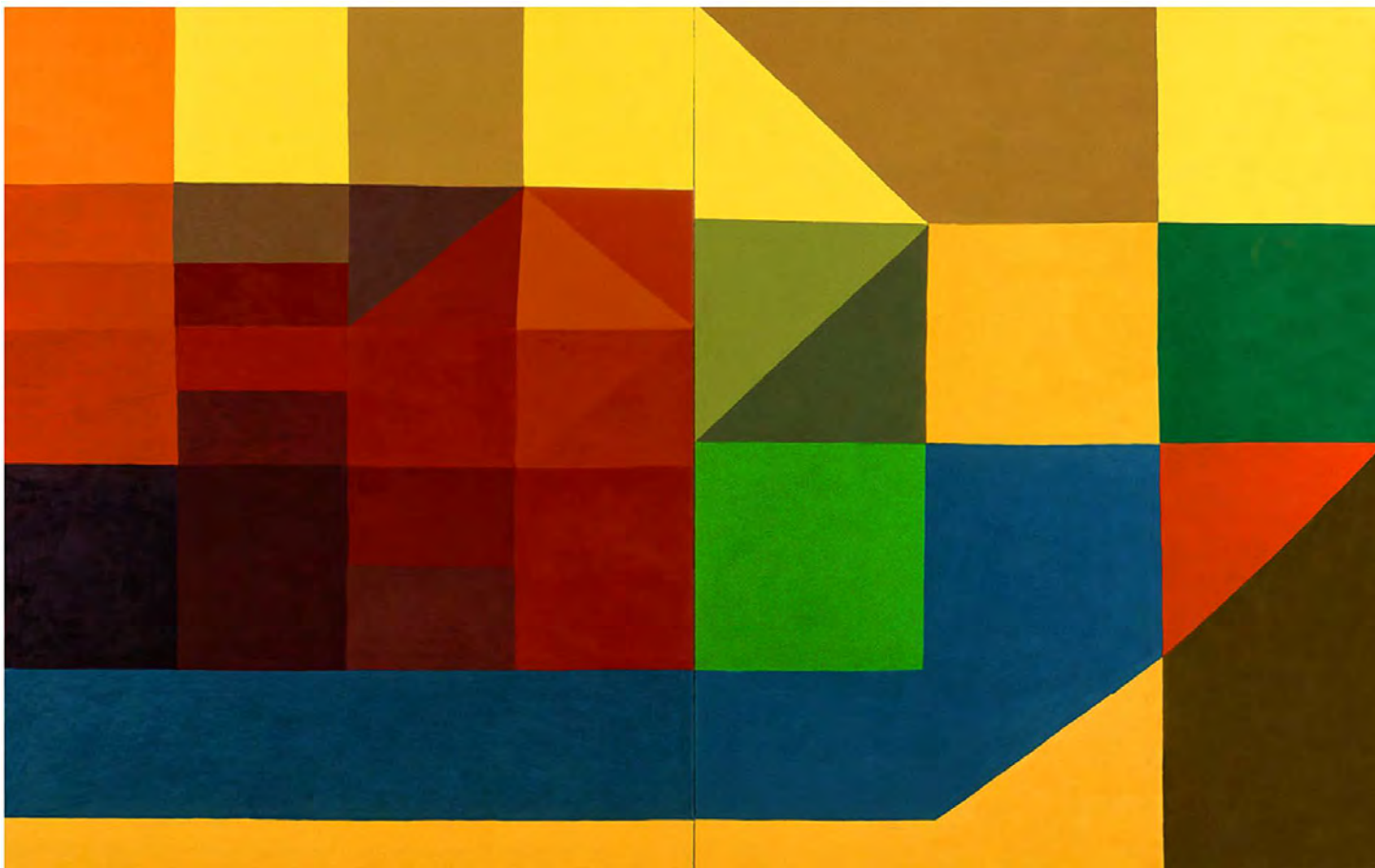
Untitled, 1996. Oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in.



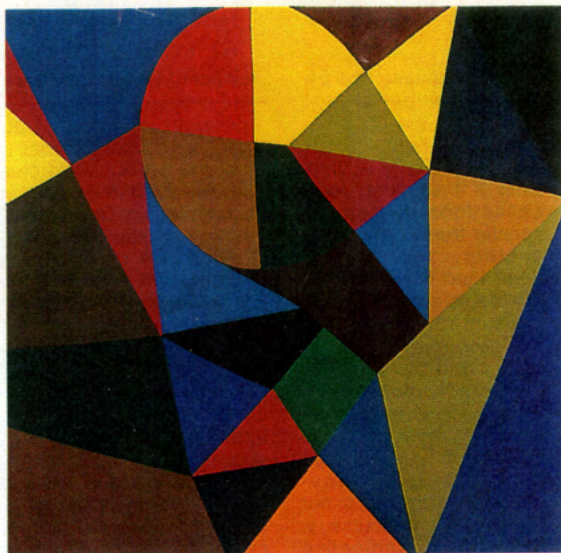
Untitled, 1996. Oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in.



Untitled, 2000. Oil on canvas, 52 x 66 in.



Untitled, 2001. Oil on canvas (diptych), 60 x 96 in.



Harriet Korman: *Untitled*, 2001, oil on canvas, 60 inches square; at Lennon, Weinberg.

Harriet Korman at Lennon, Weinberg

Harriet Korman uses what is familiar to arrive at paintings of uncommon openness and vulnerability. The oil paintings in this show, dated 1999 to 2001, are derived from simple compositions of overlapping lines with color filling in the empty spaces. This is the kind of exercise that's been given in Saturday morning art classes for about as long as anyone can remember, but in Korman's hands this timeworn device makes perfect sense. She is the most sophisticated of guileless painters. Her evident abhorrence of obfuscation is a generous quality that contains the hint of a moral stance.

In structuring her paintings, Korman employs combinations of grids, curves and triangles. *Untitled 48" x 60"*, one of several tours de force here, combines childlike visual magic and rigorous engineering. In it, two pinwheels of triangles are set inside the curves of a

large horizontal S shape. The areas adjacent to the sweep of the S, which are dominated by strong yellows, seem to scoop out the allover cobalt blue field, permitting smaller areas of orange, green and dark red to appear. As in the other works, when one color edge meets another, there is a slight fraying. Toward the top of the painting, a blue leaf shape and a blue triangle stare out from a tilted horizon line. If an objection can be made to Korman's paint application, it's in the occasional effect of small brushstrokes on a large color field area. Such strokes signal a fussiness that seems out of place in her generally calm execution.

The color is vibrant, mixed from a battery of different paint tubes, but it comes off as if from the "beginners selection" paint box, ready-made and without pretension. There are permanent greens, yellow ocher, cadmium orange, ultramarine blue and bright yellow—to name a few from memory. Only one large and one small painting use any white. The overall tonality is in the middle range and mellowing, and that's where the poignancy of the work slips in. If these paintings had a season, I'd say it was slightly past mid-summer.

—Joe Fyfe

Art In America, September 2001

ART IN REVIEW

Harriet Korman

Lennon, Weinberg
560 Broadway, at Prince Street
SoHo
Through March 17

In her beautiful new paintings, it looks as if Harriet Korman has achieved a harmonic convergence of all her painterly energies. She has been a serious and respected practitioner of Modernist grid-based abstraction for a long time, but her work has never seemed so effortlessly sure of itself, so decisively clear yet playfully free.

Each squarish medium-size canvas offers a flat, thinly but sensuously painted patchwork of richly hued interlocking shapes: trapezoids, triangles and parallelograms as well as ellipses, pie shapes, half-moons and biomorphic blobs. Ms. Korman starts, presumably, by improvising loosely gridded and swooping lines and then fills in the interstices with luscious colors ranging from bright and fruity to dark and chocolatey. She arrives at loopy harlequin fields in which small shapes seem to coalesce into larger forms and then break apart to reform into different configurations.

The paintings constantly oscillate between wholeness and fragmentation. Echoes of Klee, Miró, Kandinsky and Mondrian, as well as more exotic sources like Tantric art, add historical resonance, but not to stuffy or cleverly retro effect. Ms. Korman's paintings have their own fresh, contemporary feel. To sit and gaze at them is to remember that one of art's purposes — and not the least one — is visual pleasure.

KEN JOHNSON



Katy Siegel

Katy Siegel, a contributor to *Artforum*, writes about contemporary art and criticism at Hunter College, CUNY.

From top: Angel Franco, 11. *Street workers show their identification to National Guard to get their workplaces.* *New York Times*, October 10. 12. *Paul Hasefros, Congressional leaders sitting with airline executives after the attacks on the World Trade Center the Pentagon.* *New York Times*, September 18. 13. 2. *Gerhard Richter, 1—7, Abstraktes Bild (abstract painting).* 2001. in canvas, 55 1/2 x 55 1/2". 3. *Harriet Korman, Untitled.* 2001. oil on canvas, 54". 4. *Andreas Gursky, May Day IV.* 2000. photograph, 6' 9 3/4" x 8". 6. *Vik Muniz, Clouds.* 2001. skywriting, New York City. Photo: Rie Samuels. 7. *Vija Celmins, Night Sky #16.* 2001. oil on linen mounted on wood, 31 x 38". 8. *Crumb, I Suppose Think I've Had Too Much to Drink (detail).* 1995. ink on paper, 11 1/2". 10. *Neal Slavin, as U.S.A. Pageant, Miss Universe, Inc., 1972-76.* photograph.

1 Photojournalism Even if 2001 hadn't gone down as a generally so-so year for cultural production, art would have been hard-pressed to compete with the papers—especially post-September 11. In the past few months, *New York Times* photographers (as well as those from the Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and Al-Jazeera) have turned the front pages into an ever-changing gallery of history painting: airplanes, fallen towers, grieving firemen, grim National Guardsmen, Pakistani police beating demonstrators, Afghani refugees fleeing famine and American bombs, grinning airline execs and lobbyists feeding at the Capitol trough. These brilliant photographers responded to extraordinary events; the results were real, immediate, wrenching.

2 Gerhard Richter (Marian Goodman Gallery, New York) Room upon room of paintings that, at first look, seemed either closed off or intricately ugly; over time, the sophisticated palette opened up, and the paintings proved masterworks of touch. Richter mixed his familiar blurring and scraping with strokes and gestures that were always surprising, never gimmicky: swooping arcs, short, incisive cuts, unpredictable, off-center compositions. Although many of these works recall the artist's gray paintings, the current pictures are decidedly more involving. The conceptual apparatus is strong, but more than that, Richter just paints better than everybody else. Who could believe he doesn't believe in painting?

3 Harriet Korman (Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., New York) Perfection. Maybe these stunning abstract paintings don't get talked about because they're too difficult to talk about. Seeing them at Lennon, Weinberg was an experience curiously out of time—these are pictures neither burdened with nostalgia nor obviously beholden to current discourses of modernist revival or rejection. Absolutely new, yet as if they'd always been there. Perversely, for a critic, it's nice on occasion to see art that not only doesn't need you, but doesn't even seem to want you.

4 Andreas Gursky (Museum of Modern Art, New York) The MOMA midcareer exhibition confirmed the generally held high opinion of this artist. The broad intelligence behind his encyclopedia of contemporary life was matched in its rigor only by the photos' sweeping high modernism in all its formal incarnations: grids, stripes, chaotic allover compositions, flatness. Gursky gives our ungraspable, massively mediated modern world form as art.

5 Tom Friedman (New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York) Friedman's DIY art deeply engages everyday materials: bubblegum, pubic hair, masking tape, toothpicks, shit, construction paper. His concentrated attention and consistent set of concerns can make anything into a serious artistic medium—he gives the same consideration to the physical qualities and nature of a tube of toothpaste that Pollock might have given a tube of oil paint. What will one pound of spaghetti do when boiled and dried? What does a piece of paper look like after it's been stared at for 1,000 hours? These questions, and Friedman's art, may seem excessively local at times, but they are one antidote to what can seem like the overwhelming conditions of the past few years: globalism, big theory, bull markets.

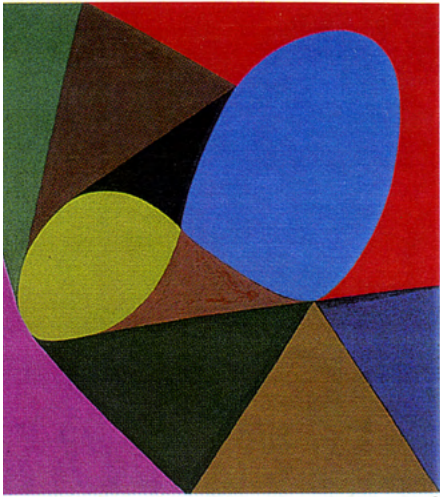
6 Vik Muniz, Clouds (New York City) This project, funded by Creative Time, was the best public art I've ever seen. Witty, beautiful, accessible—and, best of all, Muniz's crop duster-drawn clouds disappeared after they were offered, like cotton candy. (How many steel slabs can do that?)

7 Vija Celmins (McKee Gallery, New York) More heavenly visions, in new paintings and prints of the night sky. Like Muniz, Celmins combines the concrete and the abstract (a particular piece of the sky and the image of the sky we all carry around in our heads). Modernism once aspired to address the universal viewer, a character we stopped believing in a few decades ago. But with her skies and stars, Celmins seems to have found subjects that are truly—literally—universal in their appeal.

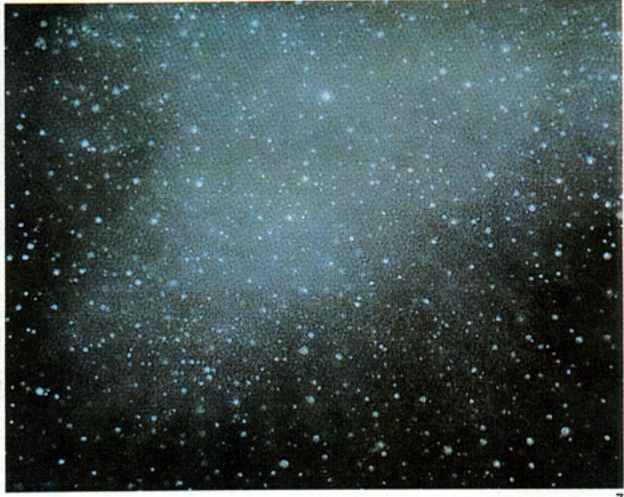
8 Richard Estes (Marlborough Gallery, New York) After seeing Richter at Marian Goodman one last time, I happily wandered into Richard Estes's show at Marlborough. These heroic genre paintings monumentalize the street: bodegas, women with baby carriages, and vast arrays of produce share urban space with windows reflecting and distorting enormous buildings across the street. Recognizing the corner of Sixth and Spring where a friend works almost gave me a heart attack. Such powerful illusionism in painting is still shocking after all these years.

9 R. Crumb Placemats (Paul Morris Gallery, New York) Offhandedly brilliant, these works were quotidian in the best sense of the word, without pretensions to being anything else. Crumb and his wife wend their way through Paris, eating and drinking and listening to outdated music—out-cranking even the French. Crumb represents the best of subculture: a passion, an investment that cannot result in great art (which depends on a connection to a mainstream tradition), but inspires nonetheless.

10 The Crowd It is the dialectic of the one and the many that powers much of photojournalism, as well as much contemporary art, and this year the crowd shot was everywhere: in Paola Morsiani's "Subject Plural" at Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum; in John Connolly's terrific "More Than One," a show of multiple portraits at Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York this summer; in "Everybody Now," which I curated with graduate students at Hunter College (but I credit the zeitgeist for the impulse); in "Uniform" at P.S. 1; and in the work of any number of contemporary artists, including Gursky and the ubiquitous and excellent Do-Ho Suh. The subject has been around since at least the nineteenth century, from the urban hordes surrounding Baudelaire's flâneur to Marx's masses. In today's world, filled with us's and them's, it resonates still more loudly. □



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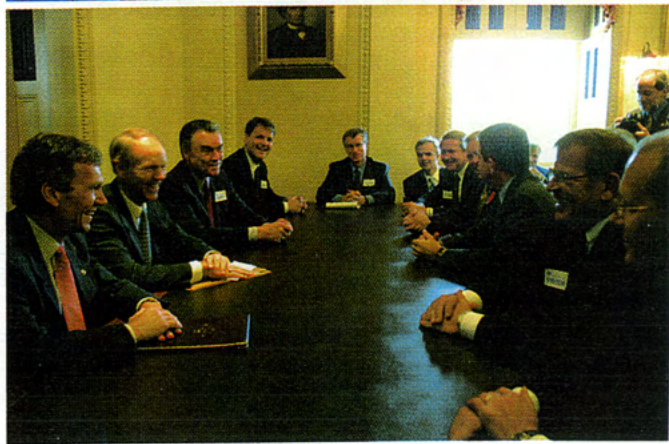
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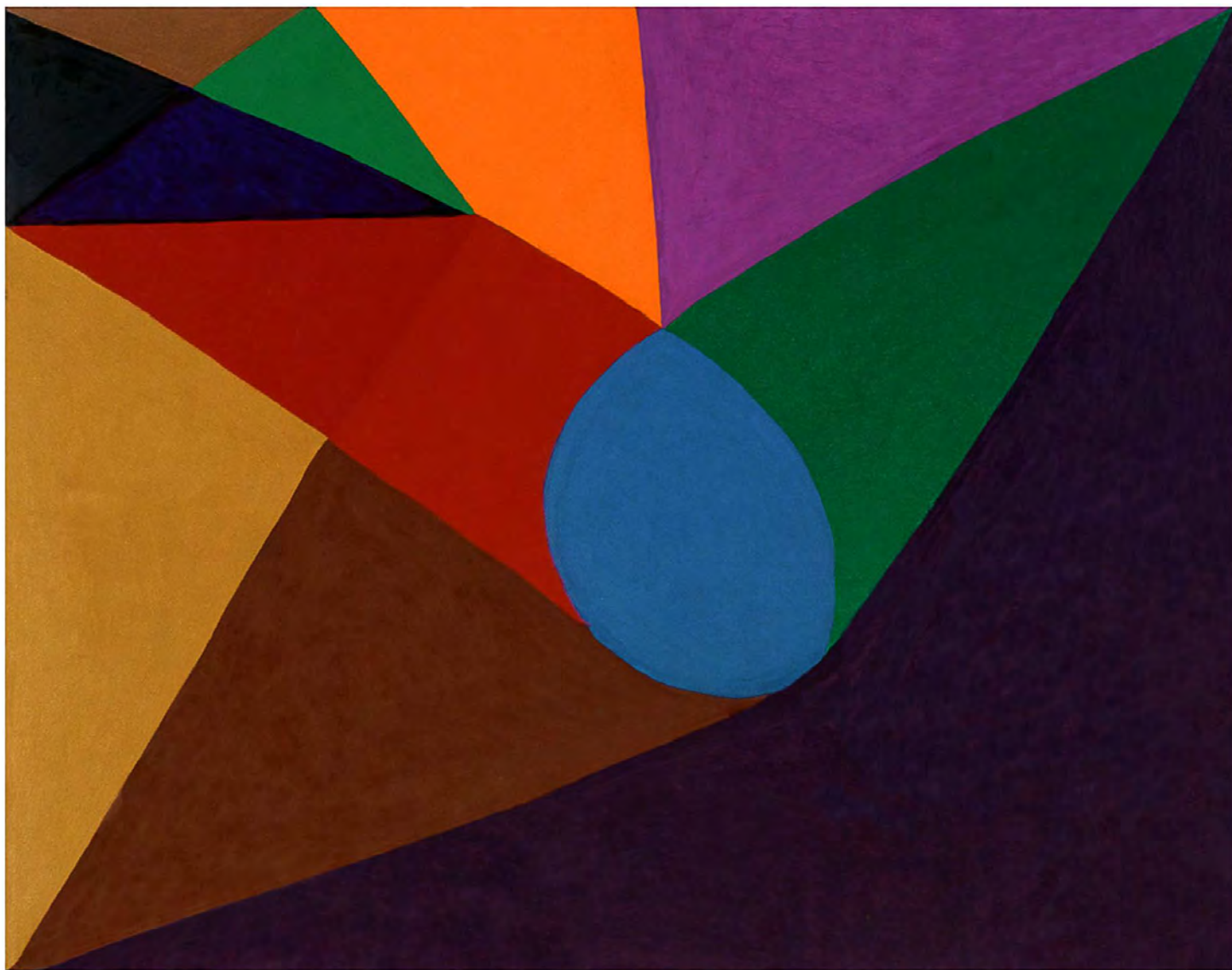
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Untitled, 2003. Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in.



Untitled, 2004. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in.

A Singular Unpredictability

The improvised and admired work of Harriet Korman makes astonishing use of color

BY STEPHEN MUELLER

For many reasons there has been a lasting mystique surrounding the work of Harriet Korman. She is revered by her peers as well as by older and younger artists. Her new show at Lennon Weinberg is likely to perpetuate that particular regard.

Early 20th century abstraction or "non-objective painting" as it was then called, comes immediately to mind. This, however, is not Korman's aim or interest. Her work comes more out of conceptual-process work of the 70s. Abstract is the key word here. Illusions, allusions, light, and space are assiduously avoided. The compositions are improvised and unpredictable. They fall into two categories, curvilinear and rectilinear. There are also multi-panel and single panel works.

The curvilinear works are based on a kind of looping line that creates overlapping shapes; the compositions work off the edge and confound conventional organizational logic by turning away from every readable image. The linear ones are arrangements of squares offset by triangles connecting oddly to the edges.

The astonishing feature in all of the work is the use of color. It is pure out-of-the-tube oil paint, evenly applied, in strong, and generally uninflected, color. Korman uses little white, except occasionally on its own. The result is a really intense color experience in stasis.

Korman's colors are anything but ingratiating. Browns and other earth tones appear next to full force greens, different reds are combined with full force blue. The compositions are such that each color gets the opportunity to interact with four or more others. The color relationships are almost always unexpected.

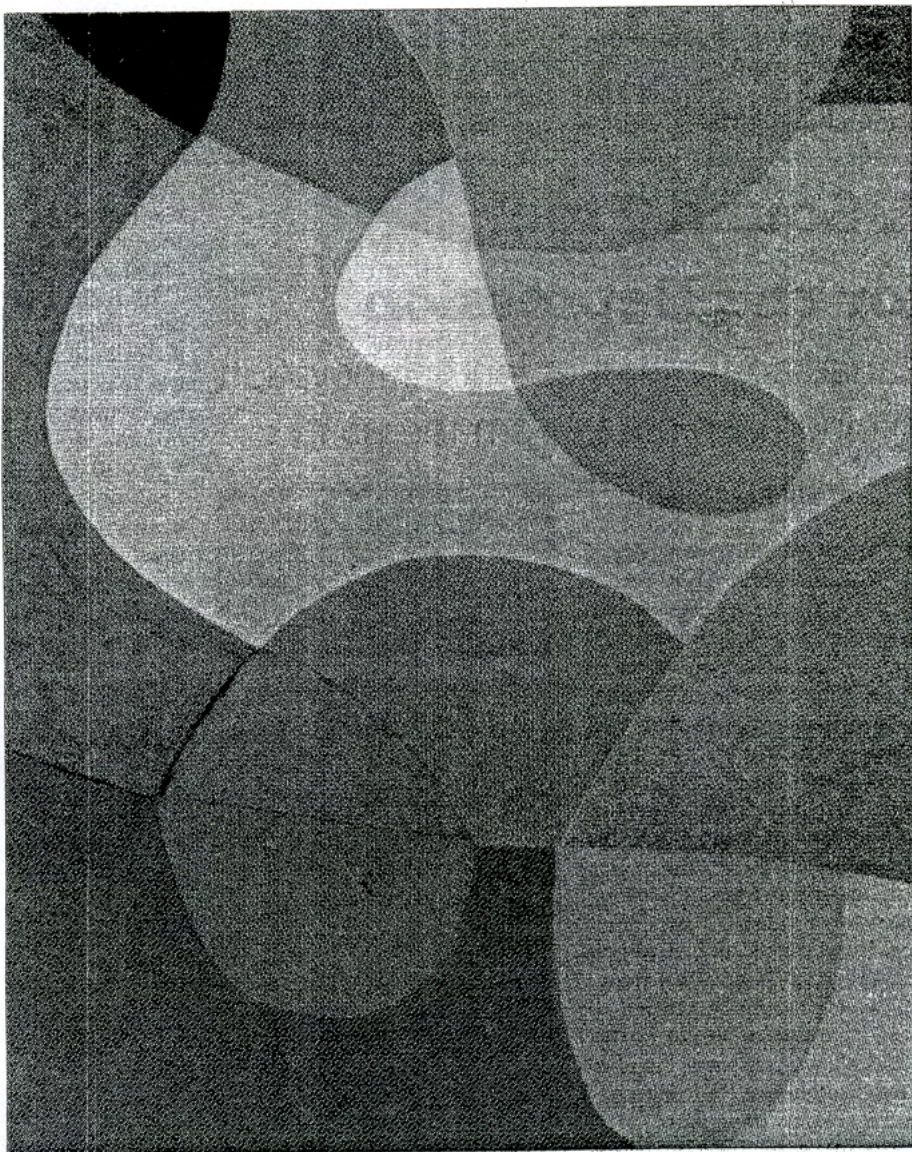
HARRIET KORMAN

Lennon, Weinberg Inc.
560 Broadway at Prince St., Ste. 308
Tue.- Sat. 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Through May 28
212 941 0012

GayCity^{NEWS}

29 APR - 5 MAY 2004

The paintings are mostly of a medium size and there are also a number of small ones. The smaller pieces are especially satisfying little blasts of active, yet monastic-feeling, color. A lot of people will look at and puzzle over these paintings. They are uncompromising and even what might be called difficult. The game plan is singular to Korman and will most likely remain so.



Harriet Korman's, "Untitled," 2003, 18"x14," oil on canvas, exemplifies the artist's examinations of vibrant colors.

Harriet Korman

Hirsch, Faye. "Harriet Korman at Lennon, Weinberg." *Art in America*, October 2004.

Art in America

October 2004, pp. 150-151

Harriet Korman at Lennon, Weinberg

In her latest show, Harriet Korman continues in much the same vein as she has for the past few years, and, in fact, the earliest works among these 18 paintings and four pastels date to 2001. There is something delightfully stubborn about this endeavor, in which Korman conceives an all-over composition of intersecting shapes and fills them in with solid colors (a few are brushy, but most are not). The forms are roughly geometric, with edges that wobble slightly—triangles, oblongs, squares and circles as well as the more complicated sections left over in between. They are always the same scale in relation to the frame and to each other—not too big, avoiding hierarchies, and not too small, eliminating the effect of scenic distance. In some of the works, a different color is assigned to every shape, but even where colors are occasionally repeated, there is everywhere the sense of a compulsion to ecumenically mete out hues. The result is cheerful, to be sure, but only faux naive; a long, careful look reveals a sure and seasoned hand.

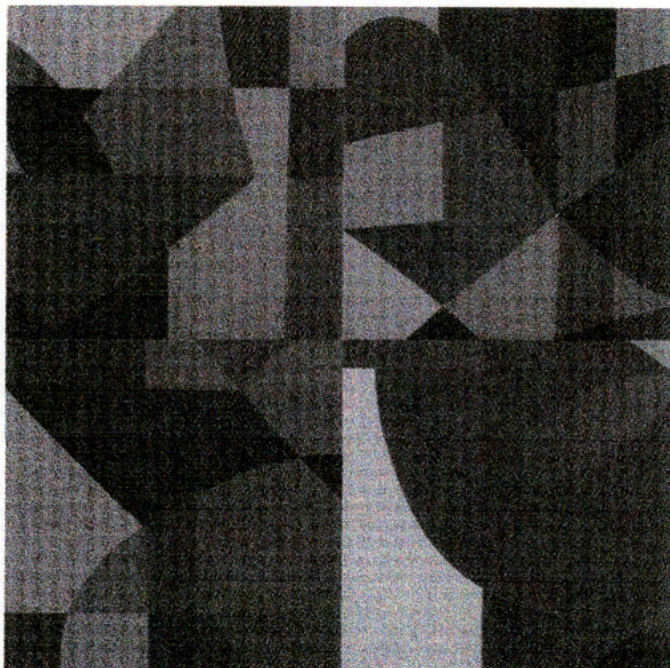
Most of the paintings are of medium size, though two multi-paneled works are grander: *Can Be Joined Any Way* (2002; 72 by 72 inches), in four parts that really can be assembled at the whim of the person hanging it, and an unti-

tled diptych (2001; 60 by 96 inches). Only a few triangles interrupt the mosaic of squares and rectangles within the latter—just enough to convey the impression that the composition is slowly moving off to the right, like a ship's bow. Light yellow predominates around the edges, maroon and brown at the center, giving it a kind of coolness at its heart, like the interior of a thick-walled house on a hot summer's day.

Three paintings from 2004, each 36 by 48 inches, felicitously hung together in the main gallery, conjured up early modern still life. The forms within break down into shapes like fruits and gourds, and some of the interstitial shapes might almost be bits of ground peering through—something of the tablecloth, say, in a Cézanne. Korman's unmodulated colors, placed side by side, bring to mind the way Matisse flattened a space by establishing chromatic uniformity in supposedly disparate elements.

Korman included a number of pastels in which an aggressive black line activates a looping composition in what may be a single gesture. Only a few areas are colored in, and roughly. The pastels recall early works by Elizabeth Murray, Korman's contemporary. They also go a long way toward explaining the energetic quality of Korman's most recent paintings, which break down more often into swooping arabesques and tilting ovals than serenely rectilinear grids.

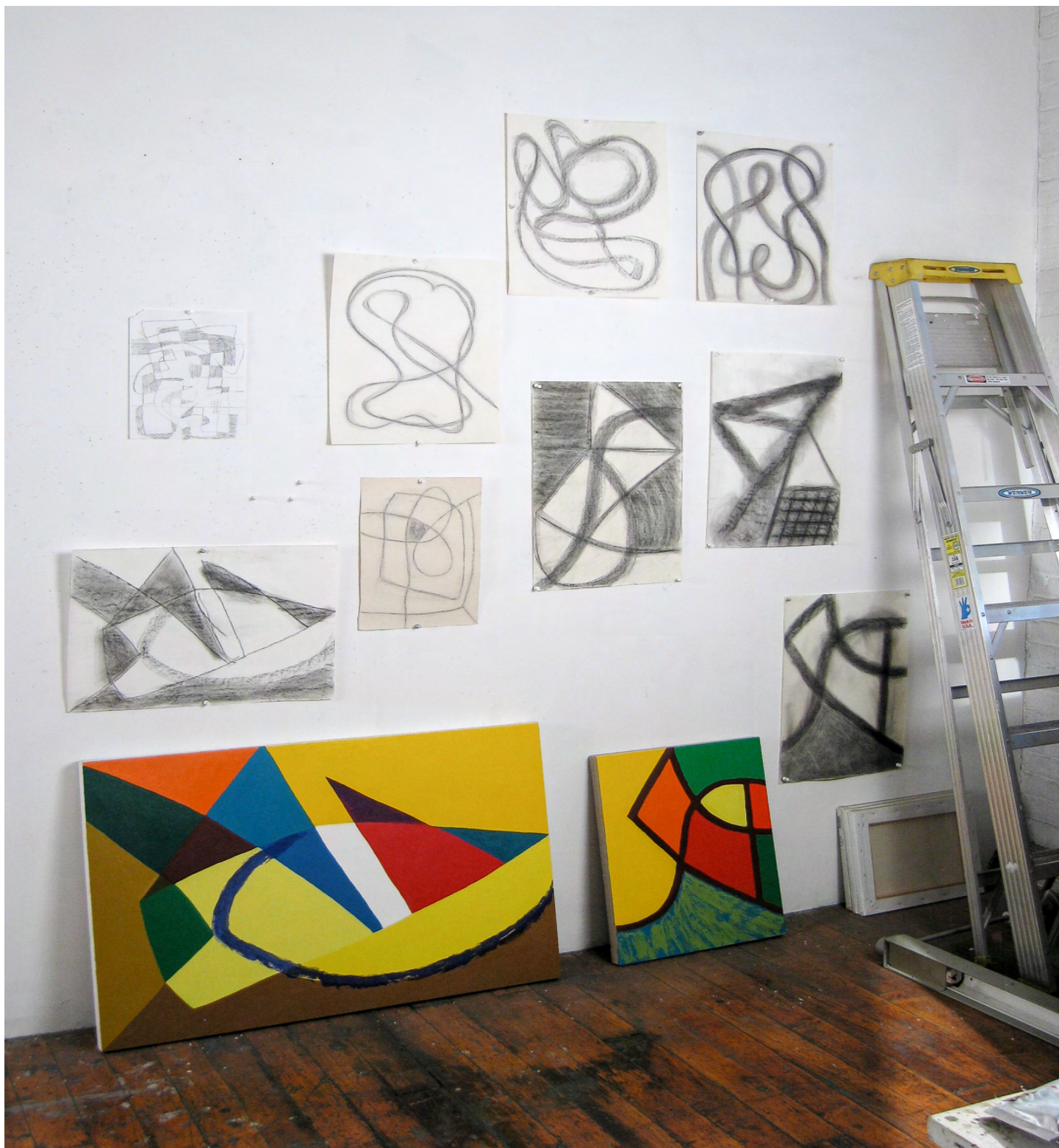
—Faye Hirsch



Harriet Korman: *Can Be Joined Any Way*, 2002, oil on canvas, quadriptych, 72 by 72 inches overall; at Lennon, Weinberg.



Untitled, 2007. Oil on canvas, 34 x 24 in.



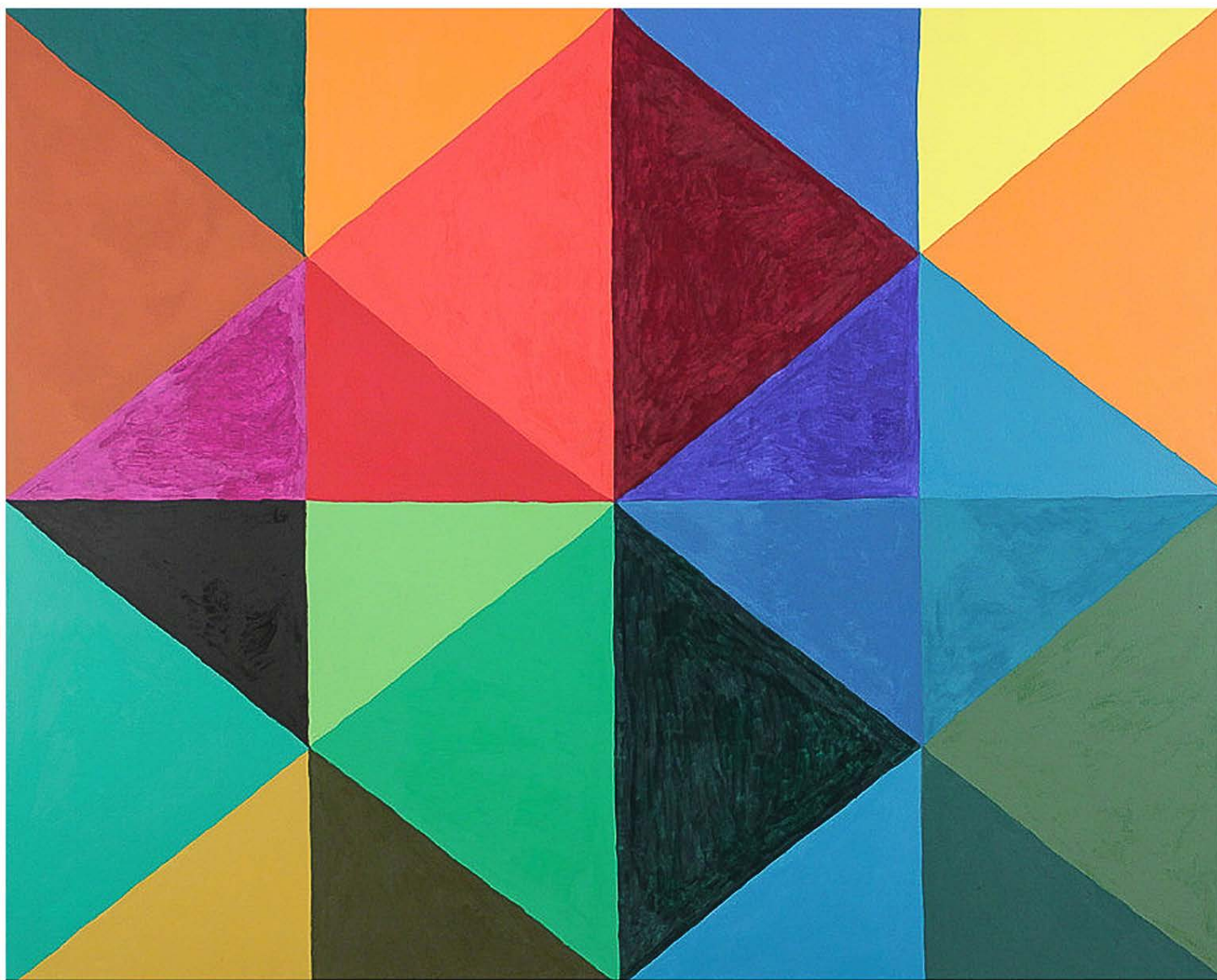
Korman's studio, 2014



Installation view, *of certain instability*, Thomas Erben Gallery, 2011



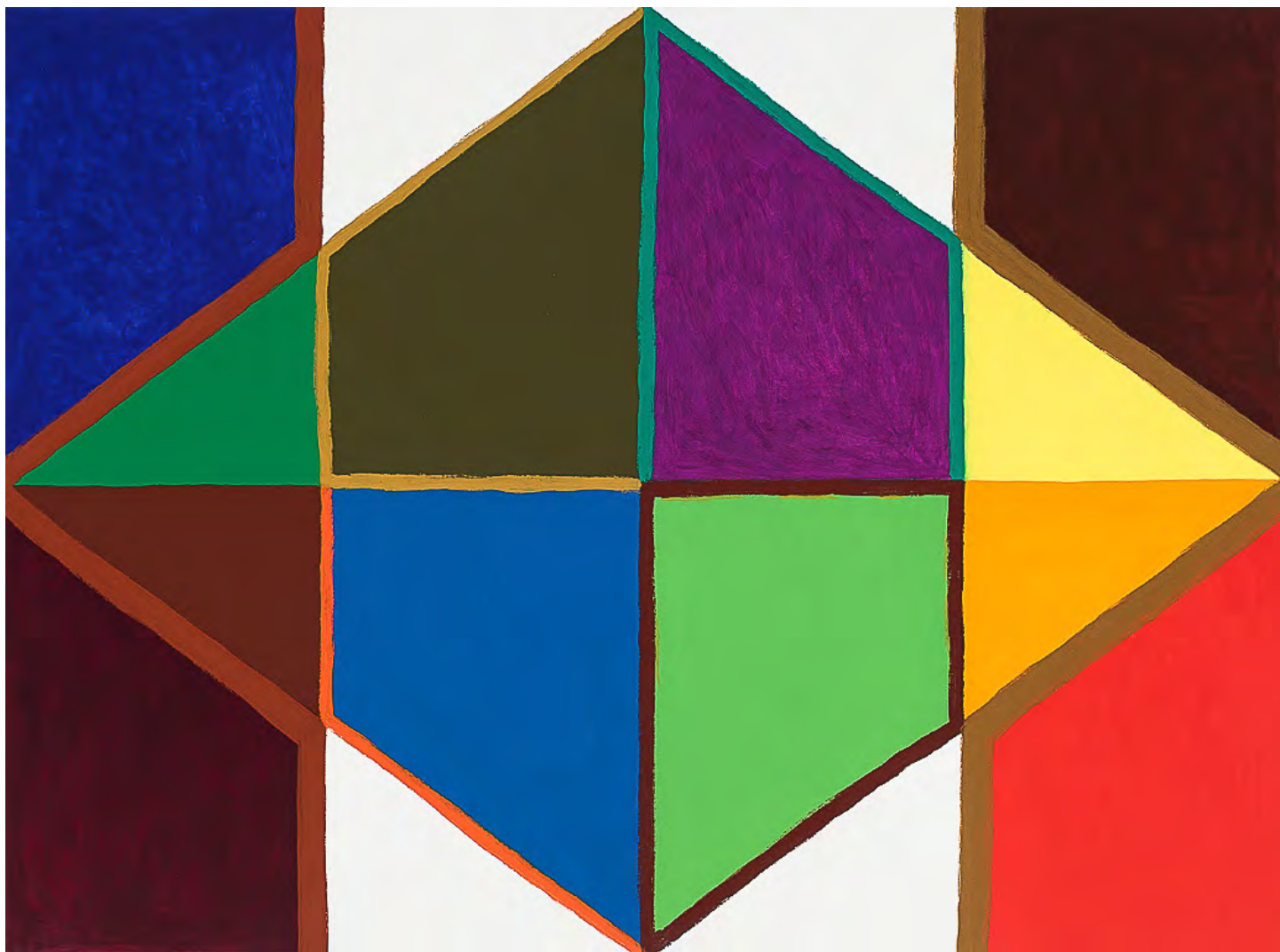
Division, 2010. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in.



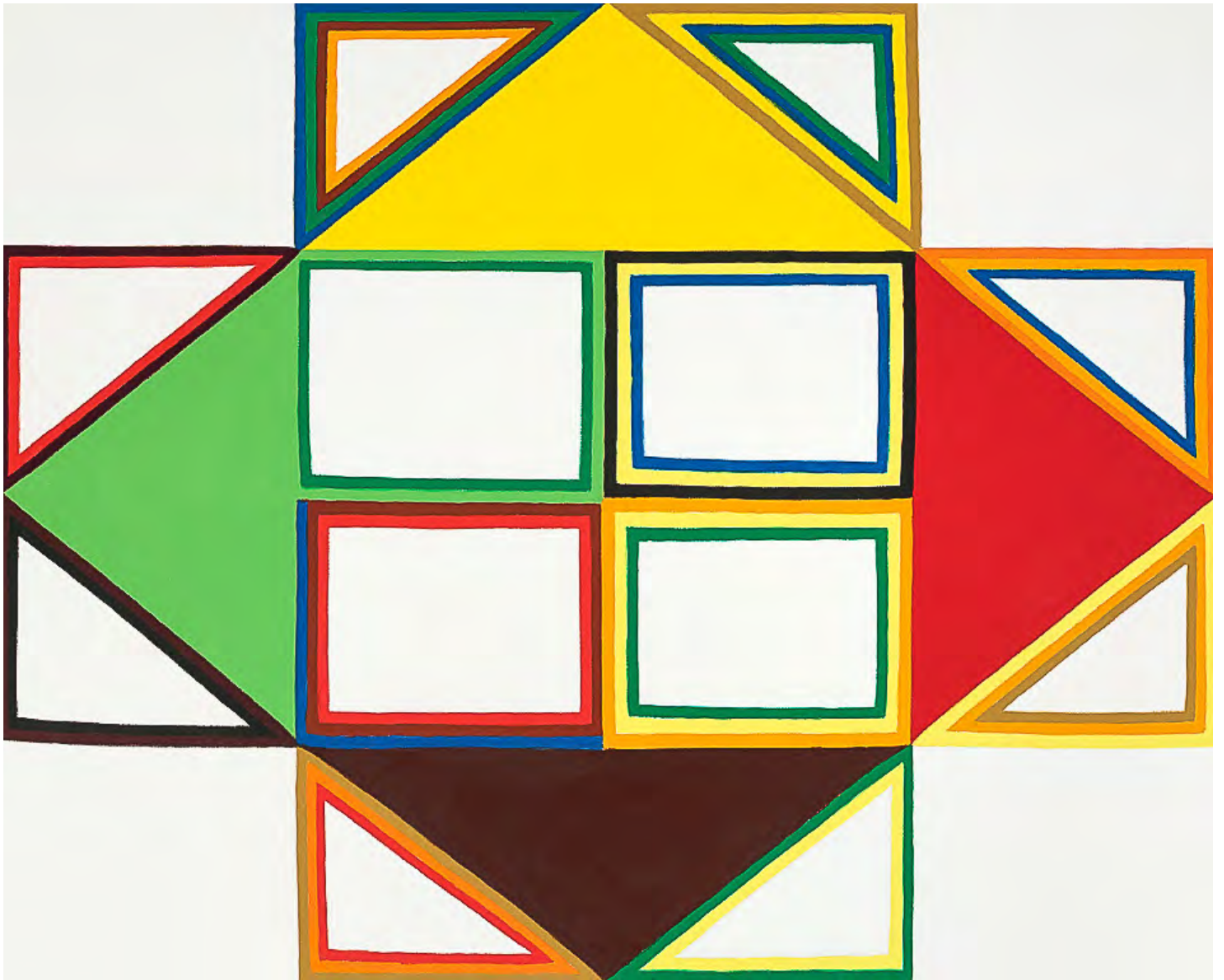
Converge, 2011. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in.



Korman's studio, 2014

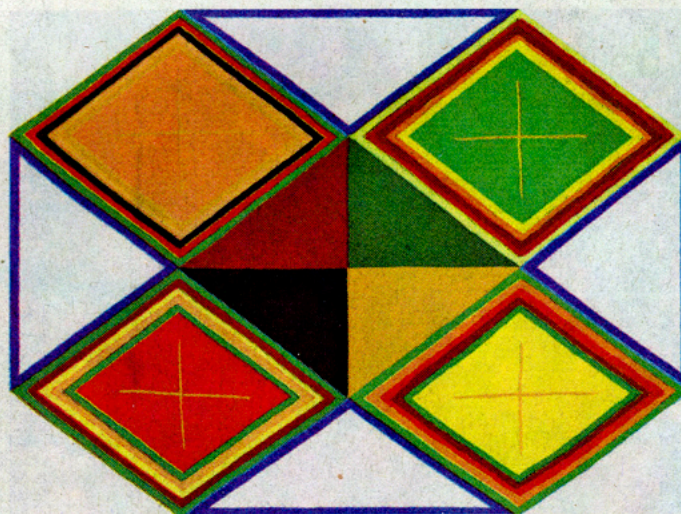


Untitled, 2013. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in.



Untitled, 2014. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in.

Art in Review



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LENNON, WEINBERG, NEW YORK

An untitled 2014 painting by Harriet Korman, whose work features a rough-hewed geometry of interlocking shapes.

Harriet Korman

'Line or Edge, Line or Color:
New Paintings and Drawings'

Lennon, Weinberg Inc.
514 West 25th Street, Chelsea
Through Saturday

Harriet Korman established her faith in freehand drawing in the early 1970s. As a briefly hot, emerging artist, she first showed at Galerie Ricke in Cologne and later at 112 Greene Street in New York and also in two Whitney Biennials. At that point, she used one layer of white paint over a few lines of blue oil stick, making transparently simple but evocative abstractions that would shame much of today's zombie formalism.

But Ms. Korman wanted more. Her spontaneous mark-making became dense and layered and, by 2000, had coalesced into a rough-hewed geometry of interlocking shapes. Her only rules: Colors were straight from the tube, and rulers were not allowed. That her unflinchingly bright motifs were hand-drawn added a noticeable optical wobble.

Ms. Korman's devotion to this scheme has slowly paid off, especially in her excellent new paintings. In the best, line once more takes an active role — as suggested by the show's title, "Line or Edge, Line or Color." Colored lines parallel the inside edges of some shapes, creating a spatial play that is further enhanced by the reintroduction of white, long absent.

It takes a moment to see that each ceaselessly fluctuating composition has nearly the same symmetrical infrastructure: a central diamond subdivided into rectangles or triangles. A series of oil stick drawings displays further variations and sometimes ventures toward a looseness that harks back to her earliest efforts.

Partly by simply letting her hand show, Ms. Korman's new paintings expand on the implications of Josef Albers's nesting squares, attesting to the inexhaustibility of both color and geometry.

ROBERTA SMITH

HYPERALLERGIC

ART • WEEKEND

Harriet Korman's Chromatic and Linear Improvisations

John Yau September 21, 2014

Harriet Korman, "Untitled" (2012),
oilstick on paper, 15 x 20 inches (all
images courtesy of the artist and
Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., NY)

The key to Harriet Korman's work is drawing. However, until this exhibition, [*Harriet Korman: Line or Edge, Line or Color, New Paintings and Drawings*](#), at Lennon, Weinberg (September 18–November 1, 2014) she has tended to show only a few drawings at a time. In this exhibition of twenty-one works, there are ten drawings done in oil stick on paper and eleven oil paintings. The drawings simultaneously stand alone and function as an outline for her paintings, providing a structure that enables her to improvise with her choice of colors. Her palette, which consists largely of vibrant primaries and secondaries set off against browns, ochers and dark violets, also contains some quirky colors, including different intensities of lime green.

Korman's hints at whimsy and disruptions of symmetry and pattern instill a remarkable freshness in her work. For the past two decades, she has divided the surface into a non-hierarchical, interlocking combination of geometric areas, which can be separated by line or abutted, edge to edge. In some cases, the line or lines a geometric shape seem to spread the color beyond its boundaries, echoing the effect of halation. But, as one learns from looking at Korman's work, every pattern, repetition or trajectory – all the traps that lull viewers into relaxing their

attention, thinking they know what will happen next – will be disrupted as the artist introduces an unexpected shift or change into the work. Such looking requires that the viewer remained focused and alert – it is a way of thinking about painting that seems almost extinct.

Harriet Korman, "Untitled" (2012),
oilstick on paper, 18 x 24 inches

At the same time, Korman is not one of those artists who claims to be carrying the torch for painting. It is refreshing to experience work that doesn't rely on the WOW factor; doesn't exhibit nostalgia for Abstract-Expressionism; and doesn't require that things be attached to the surface. Nor does it depend on non-art or distressed supports; it doesn't celebrate materialist or fetishize materialist excess; it isn't made of images, appropriated or otherwise, and it has never played the bigger-is-better game. Her geometric shapes include wedges, diamonds, triangles and rectangles – nothing eccentric. Add to this language a vocabulary of lines of varying widths and you pretty much have an idea of what she works with.

Korman's approach brings to mind John Ashbery's description of James Bishop, another wonderful painter: "the stripping down is obviously a decision of the heart, not the head." Although I have no proof of this, I feel that Korman, who began exhibiting in 1971, internalized, brewed and melded together aspects of Minimalism, Op Art and Concrete Art, which includes the work of Max Bill and Richard Paul Lhose, engendering a kind of work that was identifiably hers from the outset. She was indifferent to Pop Art, mass media and cultural reference.

For this exhibition, Korman often combines two different structures, a diamond and a cruciform, each of which she divides further. All the paintings and drawings are untitled, as she does not want to suggest any connection to a real life counterpart. She isn't painting something; she is making a painting, which in her case often means improvising upon a drawing.

Harriet Korman, "Untitled" (2013), oil on
canvas, 30 x 40 inches

A painting from 2013, which measures 30 x 40 inches, initially seems to be balanced in terms of color, particularly since all of shapes mirror their counterparts on the other side of the canvas. However, if you are looking at the vertical axis she has drawn from the painting's top edge to the bottom one, it slowly becomes apparent that the two yellows, oranges and olive greens are not the same from one side to another. The adjacent colors submerge but do not hide this fact. Once you make this distinction, you begin making others.

In another painting, where the shapes are abutted, she rotates and enlarges a form so that it suggests receding plane, introducing an illusionistic note into an otherwise flat composition. What's marvelous about these disruptions is that they intensify the logic of the painting, as well they remind us that each formal element (color, line and shape) represents a choice, that nothing is foreordained.

Harriet Korman, "Untitled" (2013), oil on
canvas, 30 x 40 inches

The oil stick drawings are an exhibition unto themselves. One can almost detect a chronology, which starts with the artist using a dark green oil stick to evenly divide a rectangle into four sections, then filling them in with red, blue, mustard yellow or lime green. After that, she introduces a diamond and cruciform shape, which she further divides them.

Korman's divisions and improvisations bear affinities with the music of Phil Glass, Steve Reich and Terry Riley. Her color shapes and lines are visual intervals defining a rectangle or field, forming clusters that go from short to long, dissolve and reconfigure. It is not the repetition that the viewer finds entrancing, but the subtle shifts and unexpected jumps, all held tightly in place by the hybrid structure, which often combines a cruciform and diamond.

Harriet Korman, "Untitled" (2013), oil on
canvas, 30 x 40 inches

Korman's paintings and drawings might look simple, but they are not. There is a quietly brilliant flair to this work, which never tries to be overtly dramatic or make a large claim. To my mind, they don't have to. There is something so solid and

satisfying to these paintings and drawings that I only wish that she will soon get the museum show that she has long deserved.

Harriet Korman: Line or Edge, Line or Color, New Paintings and Drawings continues at Lennon, Weinberg Inc. (514 West 25th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through November 1.

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