

## At the Galleries

by Karen Wilkin

A few blocks farther uptown, Thomas Erben Gallery showed recent work by [Harriet Korman](#). She has long been one of the most thoughtful, often surprising abstract painters of her generation, preoccupied with the tension between the implicit regularity of geometry and the vagaries of the improvisation. In recent years, Korman's compositions have depended upon what, at first acquaintance, seem to be Euclidean shapes described by a hand uninterested in tidiness or perfection. Her current exhibition's vibrant, generous canvases, made between 2019 and 2022, continue and expand this investigation, ringing changes on a deceptively straightforward format of nested horizontal rectangles. As Korman has taught us to expect, while there is a strong family resemblance among the works, each is a stubborn individual with a different personality, different proportions, a different balance. The more time we spend with these apparently simply organized paintings, the more compelling complexities we discover. The full-throttle, slightly acidic palette turns out to be a little "off"—in a good way; Korman's hues are never nameable. Seemingly pure reds, yellows, and oranges are subtly altered, either intrinsically or by adjacent colors. The width, proportion, and rhythm of the bands forming the rectangles vary, sometimes dramatically, as do the intervals between bands and the shape they surround. Sometimes the center shifts a bit. Sequences of clean edges are punctuated by warpings, swellings, and even, on occasion, shattering. Broad brushmarks announce themselves. In one sizzling painting, a loose swipe of ochre floats against an expanse of orange surrounded by brick red and vibrating blues, crisply framed with green and yellow. Korman presents what initially appears to be a set of uncomplicated propositions and then disrupts our assumptions. Her recent paintings are immensely satisfying for their merits, at the same time that, by making us question just what is before us, they make us think about the nature of perception itself.



Harriet Korman: *Untitled*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in. Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery.

A few muscular, speedy oil stick drawings offered an intimate glimpse into Korman's thinking. They are not studies for specific paintings, but instead, independent explorations of the generating impulse for a group of works, seemingly rapid declarations of possibilities. Korman says she values them as highly as the paintings. It's easy to see why. As in the paintings, nothing is quite what it seems. Concentrate and the images become increasingly ambiguous and richer, the tug of war between ideal geometry and the refreshingly "imperfect" hand more visible and expressive, the color more intense and unexpected. There's a great deal to look at in both Korman's paintings and drawings.