

Sara Carter's abstracts look lit from the core

By **Kenneth Baker** Published 4:00 am, Saturday, October 19, 2002

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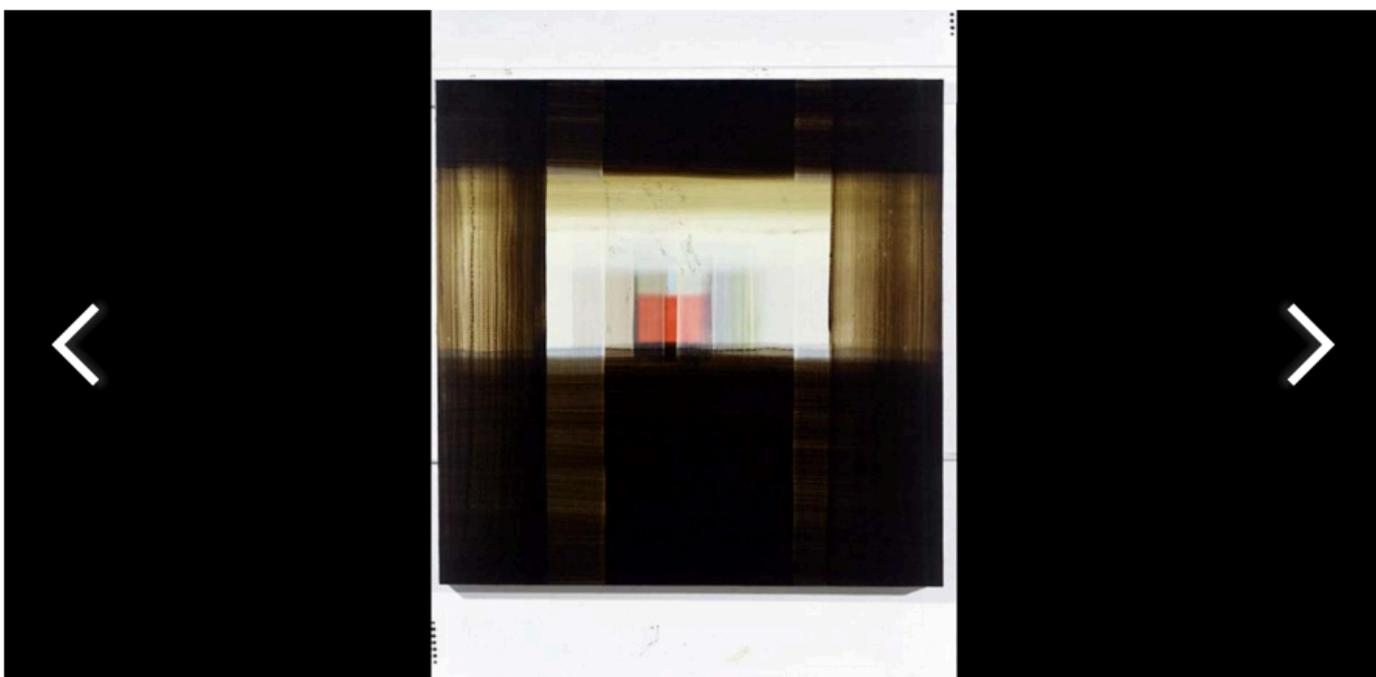


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IMAGE 1 OF 2

"Humidity VI" by Sara Carter. 48x48 acrylic canvas, 2002/ (HANDOUT PHOTO)

Abstract painters no longer imagine that their work can have content without reference. Most now see their task as managing the inevitable occurrence of allusion and illusion while working as if painting were an end in itself.

San Franciscan **Sara Carter's** new work at Graystone performs this balancing act with thrilling grace and ease.

Conforming her wide brush strokes to a loose grid on square canvases, Carter layers acrylic, generally from light to dark, in paintings that seem to have radiant cores.

An anecdotal quality often develops in her work. In "Humidity VI" (2002), the thin vertical striations of charcoal brown stop short of the blurred patches of bright color at the center, suggesting a distant view of sunlit architecture through parted curtains.

The deep-centered grids of **Ed Moses** may come to mind, as may the psychologically charged contrast of dark foreground and bright distance in some of **Edward Hopper's** work.

But Carter never lets us lose sight of her materials and process. Few painters make acrylic look so rich with evocative and craft potential.

The intimate abstractions of New Yorker Jay Kelly at **Graystone complement Carter's** well.

Kelly continues to play variations on opaque and translucent rectangles of color on small vellum sheets done so deftly in pastel that they seem to bear the imprint of light and shade, like photographic paper.

JOHN MEYER AT PAULE ANGLIM

Late in his career, San Franciscan John Meyer (1943-2002) made black and white paintings almost exclusively. Rare exceptions are three paintings in primary colors at Anglim.

In these, as in his other works of the '90s, Meyer fulfilled the promise of objectivity implicit in most monochrome painting.

He worked in tempera, a laborious, most would say obsolete medium that cannot be hurried and will not record the painter's touch.

Tempera aligns Meyer's abstractions with the great lineage of Northern Renaissance painting, as does his use of mineral pigments -- realgar, cinnabar and lapis lazuli -- too toxic or expensive for most painters to consider.

He also took care, true to the tradition, to build custom wood supports for his paintings, including the red one done on copper.

Meyer diverted all the expressive urgency of his art into these material decisions and tasks, giving the works a gravity, thoroughness and purity of which most monochrome painters can merely dream.

A reflective black lacquer-on-copper painting by Meyer from the '80s, also on view here, strikes just the right elegiac note and makes a timely echo of [Gerhard Richter's "mirror" pictures](#) in the current retrospective at the [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art](#).

LAURIE REID AT WIRTZ

The watercolors of Laurie Reid at Wirtz show that even work that tries to make everything explicit cannot keep extraneous associations at bay.

Reid works by dropping or brushing simple patterns of watercolor on very large sheets of paper.

Taking aim with a pipette figures in some of these pieces, in which she apparently tries without measuring to make a straight or sinuous line with evenly spaced drops.

By sheer coincidence the thought of aim darkens, and the dripping spots of walnut ink in "Prose Poem" (2002) inadvertently suggest bullet wounds, because a lethal sniper terrorizing the Washington area has dominated recent days' news.

The real risks Reid's work involves -- of ruining large, expensive sheets of paper by accident or misstep, of doing too little to support any meaning -- are easily overshadowed by too literal an association with something such as marksmanship.

Reid tries to root the content of her work in the visible operations that produce it.

In "A Gathering" (2002), a loose square array of gray drops stands above a similar pattern of red, yellow and blue ones. Slowly, the thought dawns that Reid may have made the gray by mixing the three primaries, making the two passages translations of one another.

This thought can make a viewer look again at pieces that appear to be monochromatic, such as "Vivid" (2002), newly uncertain whether its nuances result from dilution or close variations in hue.

ART

SARA CARTER: Paintings. JAY KELLY: Works on paper. Through Nov. 2. Graystone, 77 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 956-7693, www.graystone.org.

JOHN MEYER: Paintings. Through Nov. 2. Gallery Paule Anglim, 14 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 433-2710, www.gallerypauleanglim.com.

LAURIE REID: VIVID: Works on paper. Through Nov 9. Stephen Wirtz Gallery, 49 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 433-6879, www.wirtzgallery.com.