

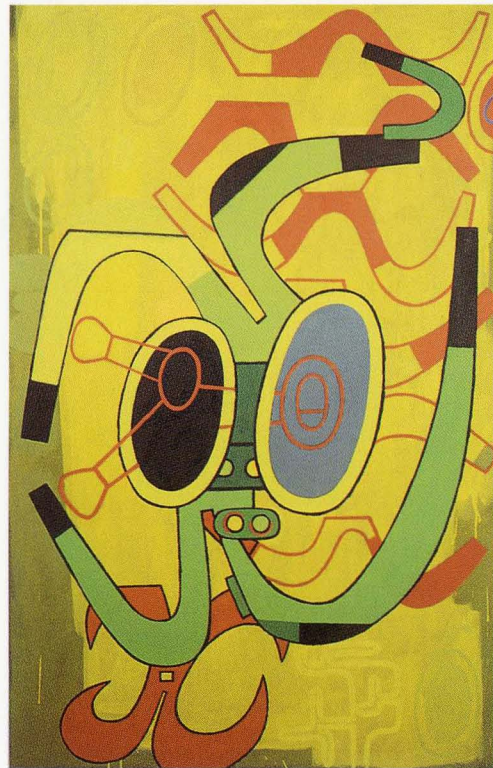
Almost Giddy: Optimism in Contemporary Abstraction

# GIDDY

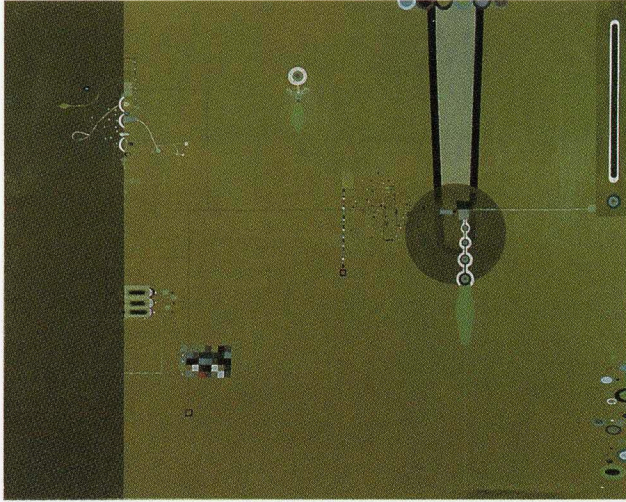
September 28 ~ October 25, 2001  
Rhodes College, Clough-Hanson Gallery

The artists in *Almost Giddy* are assembled in an effort to recognize and celebrate a trend in contemporary abstraction: a genuine sense of optimism that has emerged from the quagmire of self-absorbed angst of the late eighties and early nineties. For this show I wanted to gather artists who shared this sense of optimism, not only in their imagery but also in their approach and attitude. Each artist has in common a sense of excitement and wonder in their work.

**D**avid Storey's work is like seeing a tandem bicycle for the first time: you recognize some of the parts, but something is awry. His forms rhyme with shapes of heads, eyes, boomerangs, and children's toys: a twenty-first century version of Paul Klee's twittering machines. Like fan blades frozen mid-whir in a gravityless field, his images mix a youthful sense of play with a mature painter's quirky resolve. He playfully blends painterly abstraction with a super-graphic savvy. The outlines hold intact the layered, geometric planes of color, while well-defined curvilinear shapes—made with mushy paint—mix with the crispest of lines. The combination of round shapes and elongated forms almost creates a new species: a delirious hybrid of animal and machine.



*Sisturm*, David Storey



*Green Headquarters*, Dannielle Tegeder



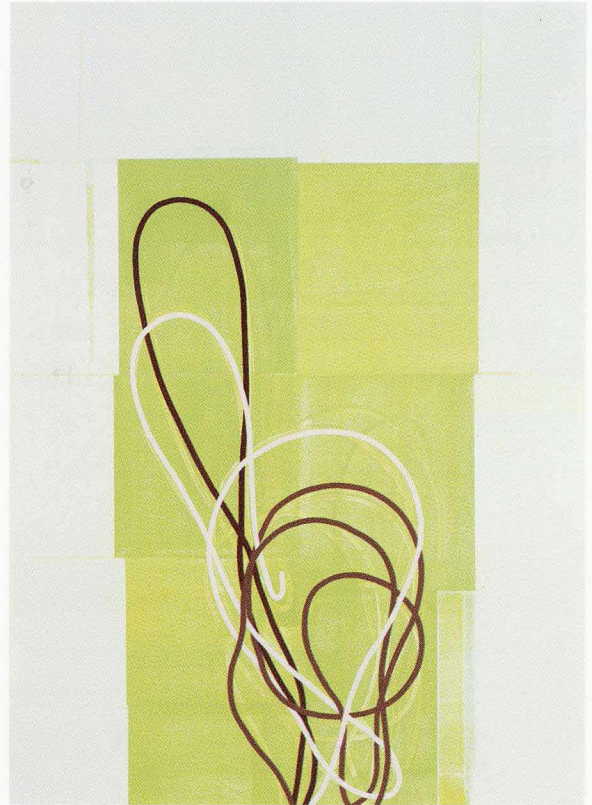
*Giddy*, Anna Kunz

Dannielle Tegeder uses her work to create what she describes as “safe cities.” The paintings resemble blueprints for Utopian environments where no harm could befall the inhabitants. In her paintings, Tegeder mixes the colors of the Utopian city (rich greens and raw umber) with the innocent colors one would find in a Delia’s catalog (pale pink and sunshine yellow). The juxtaposition of colors in her paintings echoes the symbiotic color relationships of the fashion posters plastered throughout New York. The delight in Tegeder’s paintings lies not only in the color but also in the detail. Creating an imaginary circuitry, her marks are sometimes small and obsessively repetitive. While some lines create uneven paths, meandering through the carefully modulated planes of color, the calligraphic quality of the edges keeps them warm and human.

Anna Kunz’s work is firmly rooted in the tradition of Abstract Expressionist painting in that it serves as a narrative record of the painting experience. The paintings’ layers show the different paths chosen in the process of their creation. Each movement—from the translucent marks that show the speed of the hand, to the mashing of opaque paint, to the fluidness of the watery drip—conveys the joy that Kunz takes from painting. Through the layering of actions and the use of color, the paintings reveal themselves slowly to the viewer. Kunz mixes vibrant yellows and greens with colors that are subdued and reverent, like those in the happiest Rothko painting. The

paintings' forms are made even more inviting by their softness, recalling the shapes of lily pads, jelly beans and bean bag chairs. In the end, the path of the painter becomes as important as the final result, as the viewer is intrigued by the richly layered narrative.

Dan Devening's paintings present themselves as powerfully beautiful constructions. The pieces are meticulous in their layering of atmospheric background planes and energetic contour lines. The rigidity of the background grids and rows serves as the stage for the boisterous spontaneity of the tangled cord-like forms. This sense of movement has its origins in the physical process of the painter. Devening uses a print roller to lay out the background area, into which he carves a series of grooved cords with a round rubber tool. The tool smoothly glides through the paint to create furrows; Devening fills in some of the furrows with paint while leaving empty furrows to function as ghosts. The effect of the painted furrows, supernaturally crisp and clean, slows the speed of the once-activated lines to a stillness. While the lines are elongated with the pull of gravity, somehow the direction in which they are pulled defies what we know to be true. Although Devening's work is cerebral in terms of the perfectly chosen color harmonies and the careful application of paint, the paintings appeal viscerally to the viewer's senses.



*Multi-Mode*, Dan Devening

Gary Komarin does in his paintings what acrobats do on the high wire: there is a constant balancing act between sophistication and simplicity, between cartoon-tinged expressionism and eloquent abstraction. His paintings challenge the viewer with images that at first seem simple and even awkward, but given enough time, the complexity of the parts reveals itself and the viewer begins to see Komarin's relentless artistic cunning. The gritty surfaces have a sense of urgency that is conveyed by the way he uses quick-drying materials: tempera, acrylic, graphite, or whatever happens to be at hand. He uses the shape and form to play with the moment of recognition: when does a mark stop being a mark and become an object? The reoccurring shapes in his work—the wig, the cake, the vase—lend themselves to different levels of interpretation. At the same time, these images create a sense of absurdity in the painting: they are imprecise, quirky, and even romantically fanciful.



*Trapeze in Blue*, Gary Komarin

In her sculptures Kellie Murphy uses materials such as polystyrene, industrial gypsum, and foam rubber; she then adorns these materials with Scottish plaids or miniature leopard spots. The pieces are natural in shape and pattern, while the industrial materials add a playful sense of irony. In her previous work the objects held specific shapes and were covered with patterns; however, in her piece for the show, the objects themselves become the patterns. In *Spill* the artist uses heavyweight vinyl, cut into the shapes of



*Spill*, Kellie Murphy

liquid spills. Sagging under their own weight, these three-dimensional objects are thick and bulky, qualities that go against characteristics normally associated with spills. Their irregular coloration, soft material and rubber piping along the seams, creates an effect that makes the pieces both friendly and alien, both modern and primordial. These strange, new shapes, inserted into a known world, infect their surroundings with an absurdist aesthetic, creating a delightful sense of play.

In thinking about abstraction in the early part of the 21st century, it is exciting to think that artists' attitudes are positive and are moving towards a more optimistic approach—heralding the return of optimism to contemporary abstraction, pointing to a blithe spirit in the house of beauty. The show itself is a celebration, highlighting a particular view of the world and inviting us to re-evaluate our place in it.

Hamlett Dobbins, Interim Director,  
Clough-Hanson Gallery, Rhodes College

David Storey  
*Sisturm*  
Oil on canvas  
62" x 40"  
2000  
Courtesy of Dinaburg Arts

Dannielle Tegeger  
*Green Headquarters*  
Mixed media on canvas  
48" x 60"  
2000  
Courtesy of Jan Cicero Gallery, Chicago

Anna Kunz  
*Giddy*  
Oil on panel  
48" x 48"  
2000  
Courtesy of a Tennessee collection

Dan Devening  
*Multi-Mode*  
Oil on canvas  
71" x 51"  
Courtesy of Roy Boyd Gallery, Chicago

Gary Komarin  
*Trapeze in Blue*  
Mixed media on canvas  
24" x 18"  
2001  
Courtesy of Vanier Gallery, Scottsdale

Kellie Murphy  
*Spill*  
Vinyl and plastic piping  
3' x 5' x 3"  
2001