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ART; Show of Paintings Reflects Abstract Mixed With Pop Art

By D. DOMINICK LOMBARDI MARCH 26, 2000

IT is getting more and more difficult to classify or categorize most contemporary art. This, in part, stems from the fact that artists, who are as overstimulated as anyone else in today's fast-paced world, can be influenced by any number of outside stimuli from both the private and the public world. An example of this is the show here at Kenise Barnes Fine Art, which is titled "Stations."

The show includes 17 mixed media paintings by David Collins, whose work clearly mixes influences and remembrances from a multitude of sources. Mr. Collins's style of painting is a cross between Abstract and Pop Art, though his compositions owe much to Pattern Painting. He applies, then removes paint much like a sculptor might, as when working with clay, though the power of the three-dimensional space he creates is through the use of color and tone.

Mr. Collins's work could be likened to the paintings of Philip Taaffe, though, for the most part, they are more layered and far less rhythmic. His technique is varied, and it, in a way, parallels the layers of interests that surround him.

He paints with oils, over a layer of thickly applied acrylic paints, a surface that is scraped and sanded, then repainted and drawn on with grease and graphite pencils.

Mr. Collins works on a number of paintings at the same time, moving from work station to work station, as each painting develops both as an individual statement and as an integral and connected element to his entire thesis. This, and the fact that Mr. Collins was raised a Roman Catholic, which accounts for his knowledge of the stations of the cross brings the viewer to the exhibition's title, "Stations."

His vocabulary of images includes multiples and modifications of the circle, which refers to his father's work in the field of communication sciences. His use of modified grids, which look like aerial views of his hometown in an Iowan farmland, and the simplified botanical forms, which look like suns or flowers, points to his family's architectural heritage.

"Station III" (2000) is one of his least defined and least layered works. Using a palette dominated by pale green, yellow and ecru colors, Mr. Collins paints bull's-eyes and rectangles. A last detail -- a few long arching lines -- is etched or drawn into the surface of the wet paint, defining both the foreground and the background. The few faint lines seem to create a mechanical representation of sound, which can be somewhere between a subtle intrusion and a major penetration within this given space.

The larger, black rectangle in "Distal Notes III" (2000) contains ghostly streaks and smears, creating mass and depth. In many of his works, like "Distal Notes III" and "Greenland Station" (2000), Mr. Collins uses stenciled numbers and letters. Mr. Collins's use of the stencil, and the use of the bull's-eye or target symbol in works like "Station III" and "Red Receiver" (2000), and the drippy appearance of his paints, and the strong emphasis of the modified grid in works like "Greenland Station," are references to the works of the Pop artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.

In "Untitled, Cluster VI" (2000) and "Station VII" (2000), any number of references can be found that are signified by matching upright and inverted circle clusters. These markings, which indicate equilibrium or harmony, seem to move forward and backward in space.

Some of these reflected, circular forms are more pronounced, as in "Untitled, Cluster V" (2000). In "Cluster V," the circles are plotted with dots, like a radar blip or the designated position of a planet's orbit. "Cluster V" is also this exhibition's clearest and boldest painting. In the upper portion of the canvas, where oranges and blues collide, numerous scalloped forms make up a sort of spatial vacuum. In the background, more targets appear, defining the middle ground in this kaleidoscopic view of sound and space.

Mr. Collins's smaller works, which tend to be much simpler, have an entirely different scale. Many are tondo (round) paintings, and they have a far more contemplative appearance. Here, we see the first hints at an Eastern aesthetic, a focused view of a world that, because of its purity, is more spiritual.

In "WCB III" (2000), one sees the simplest representation of the existence of heaven, and in the square painting titled "Untitled, Guadalupe" (2000), one might catch a glimpse of what appear to be the after-images of a Buddha and a saint. There is also a mix of Eastern and Western sensibility in some of Mr. Collins's other paintings, as exemplified by a combination of clarity and confusion, which is most easily felt in "Station VIII" (2000) and "Untitled, Totem" (2000).

Mr. Collins's strokes can be rushed and haphazard, or they can be sensitive and precise. He is both an emotional painter and a tireless experimenter. And as a calculating player, the hardest thing, it would seem for Mr. Collins, is to know when to stop searching.

"Stations" will be on view at Kenise Barnes Fine Art through April 8. The number to call for information is 834-8077.