

ART in AMERICA  
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Edith Baumann-Hudson at Newspace

Edith Baumann-Hudson makes an important contribution to abstract geometric painting in Los Angeles - both by pursuing purist ideals and by demonstrating the ample possibilities of the language of abstraction. During the past decade, her work has developed in a measured way from paintings of juxtaposed colorful rectangles, through monochromatic explorations, to a



recent series of narrow vertical canvases punctuated by horizontal bands at top and bottom. In this, her first solo exhibition in LA, there were eight large acrylic on canvas paintings, all of them new, each composed of equidistantly spaced horizontal bars of a single color on a contrasting monochromatic field.

Baumann-Hudson's paintings might be described as hard - edge due to the straightness of the line where color meets color. The edges of the bars are not, however, mechanical or brittle; they are, rather, soft and almost silky. Most of the paintings are based on cool/warm contrasts of bars and ground, with two colors tonally keyed to keep them in the same plane. With the exception of one very dark painting, the works are emphatically frontal. Baumann-Hudson finely tuned sense of structure and scale is enhanced by her use of extremely complex color. Each

color is made of many individual hues; at times, the colors are nearly unnameable. A number of her new paintings are grisaille experiments, with blacks, whites, grays and creams juxtaposed and contrasted. The phenomenon of simultaneous contrast is everywhere operative, bringing out in a neutral color the complement of the neighboring hue.

In the foyer of the gallery was a rather delicate painting of tinted near-whites: eight pale lavender bars on a yellowish ground. Sunlight from the doorway caused this painting to almost disappear. The smaller of the two rooms was lit Rothko-style, dark and cool, while the main room was warmed by natural and artificial light. The paintings participated accordingly by absorbing or reflecting the light.

The largest and darkest painting, *Black/Black #2*, was made up of four wide bands of a soft, cloudy blue-black on a red-brown field; at times fading away, especially at the edges, the bars were nearly imperceptible. In *Grey/Black #8*, the battleship gray of the ground is cool and hard, yet so softly inflected that it seems virtually breathed on the surface of the canvas. The warmer black bars are firmly positioned with fine, sharp edges.

Of all the paintings, *Blue/white #11* is the most vivid. It was also the only work in the show that could be legitimately described as a "stripe painting". With nine fairly narrow navy-blue bands stretching across an absolutely white ground, there is no shape to focus on or to hold in one's vision. The painting does not present itself as a series of stacked, horizontal rectangles, but rather as a single, continuous field. The contrast is sharp, the optical effect intense but not illusionistic. It is a cold painting, in color and in delineation, yet full of strong emotion.

Frances Colpitt