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VISUAL ART SOURCE

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

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Minoru Kawabata, "Yellow Slow," 1965, acrylic on canvas, 64 x 44", at David Richard Gallery.

Continuing through March 27, 2011

David Richard Contemporary Santa Fe, New Mexico

a.k.a Zen examines the diverse means by which recent abstraction registers and reconfigures Zen Buddhist traditions. Reflecting the style's privileging of direct experiences over defined credos, the exhibition takes as its central focus works by seventeen modern and contemporary artists that loosely evoke the experiential states achieved through meditation and dharma practice.

Emphasizing the diversity of interpretations brought to bear on the Zen activities, the exhibition has been loosely conceived as a movement in four distinct acts. The first gallery focuses on gestural abstraction. Standouts include Masatoyo Kishi's loamy, proto-Kiefersque abstractions and Robert Motherwell's engagement with Chinese calligraphic conceits. The second gallery is suffused with such visual transcriptions of meditation as Minoru Kawabata's sun-drenched take on the Hituzendo tradition and Laura de Santillana's semi-translucent glass sculptures, whose merger of Neolithic vessel forms with the oscillating sheen of California Finish Fetishism is as if Ai Weiwei eschewed Pop Art allusions in favor of West Coast Minimalism. Lisa Cahill's oceanic glass wall reliefs and Marion Estes' nebulous shaped paintings announce the third gallery's dedication to nature-inflected abstraction. In the fourth gallery, Simon Aldridge's sprayed acrylic on glass paintings re-envision Larry Bell as a Pop-savvy colorist, and Maxwell Hendler's works blur the divide between mirrors and monochromes.

Despite the expansiveness of its overriding theme, the exhibition reads cogently through a defined focus on works that merge a proclivity towards visual simplification, automatist strategies, and a highly process-oriented approach. It amounts to far more than the sum of its formalist experiments, reminding us that every aesthetic carries with it an ethic.

- Alex Ross