

Michael Rubin

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"THE SPIRIT HOLDS"

19 October – 28 December 1990

Introduction by
April Kingsley


Philip Samuels
FINE ART

8112 MARYLAND AVENUE •

SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI 63105 •

[314] 727-2444 •

FAX [314] 727-608

MICHAEL RUBIN

Discussing abstraction in the late fifties, and the paintings of his friend Jackson Pollock in particular, Franz Kline noted that when the work lacks an obvious motive for its existence - - that is, recognizable subject matter - - one must pay special attention to the care that went into its making. "Jackson always knew it," he said, "that if you meant it that much when you did it, it will mean that much." Kline didn't feel that many people understood that yet. "It's assumed that to read something requires an ability beyond that of a handwriting expert," he said, "but if someone throws something on a canvas it doesn't require any more care than if someone says, 'I don't give a damn.'" Kline believed that the reality was much more profound: "Like with Jackson: you don't paint the way someone thinks you *have* to paint, you paint the way you have to in order to *give*, that's life itself, and someone will look and say it is the product of knowing, but it has nothing to do with knowing, it has to do with giving." Michael Rubin understands this perfectly: he's painting pictures just as free of subject matter, just as resolutely abstract, and as fully giving as those that were painted by the generation that put America on the map of art history in the years just after he was born in 1946.

The first generation Abstract Expressionist spirit is still alive in Michael Rubin's paintings, which is why they feel connected with the work of his forebearers even though they look very different. Pollock may have been Rubin's primary inspiration, but artists like Morris Louis, Sam Francis, and Milton Resnick of the so-called second generation seem to have made an impact on Rubin as well. These painters amplified Pollock's compositional "all-overness" in ways that have, in turn, been amplified by Rubin. In their physical surfaces, Rubin's paintings have a great deal in common with what might be termed a later branch of Abstract Expressionism - - the Olitski-Poons-Bannard

マイケル・ルビン

1950年代後期の抽象派
ロックについてフランク
目瞭然とした題材がない
別なる配慮に注意をしな
のあたりの事は承知して
る。]と言っている。ク
人はまだ少ない様である
門家以上の能力を要する
出された物に対しては「
も言っている。クリンは
人の期待に沿う為に画く
ある。人によってはそれ
いが、知ることとは一
いう様に現実とはもっと
このあたりの事を十分承
にアメリカを芸術史上、
の様に題材に捕われず実
ている。

マイケル・ルビンの作品
る。であるからこそ、一見
の作品とのつながりを感じ
たのはポロックであるが、
ス、サム・フランシス、ミ
これらの第二世代の芸術家
の広がり)と言われる構成
ている。ルビンの作品の表
られるオリツキー/プーン
点が多いが、外観上はあま
プーンのボードワ・ピンクに
後継者であるが、彼は非常
流儀を自分の情緒的欲求を
る。

ルビンの作品は、小奇麗で
に、肉、大地、流血問題、
そのものに拘わっている様に

school of thickened pigment relief-paintings - - though, again, they don't look like them. Rubin is thus an heir to the entire painterly tradition that stretched over thirty years from Pollock's bravado to Poons' boudoir pinks, but somehow, somewhere along the way, he found the strength to make this style serve his own emotional needs instead of succumbing to its highly-seductive physical blandishments.

Rubin's pictures aren't pretty or decorative. Instead they seem involved with the stuff of life - - flesh, earth, blood-filled tissues, chemical mixtures, forests, galaxies, the microscopic structure of minerals. His form-world empathizes with, rather than describes, nature. The interacting physical system which is the post-Newtonian view of the universe is replicated in Rubin's paintings where forces such as gravity and thrust (his) interact with the viscosity, fluidity, weight and the surface tension of matter (his pigment). The paint - - now thickened acrylics - - is applied to the surface in screen-like layers. It is put on with his fingers, dripped on from sticks, spattered on, trowelled on, poured on in rivulets, and sometimes he even attaches pre-dried clots of pigment to the canvas as well. Like Pollock before him and Monet before that Rubin has developed a large repertoire of very specific kinds of strokes which he draws upon at will.

The number of methods of applying paint at his command has increased in ratio with the number of color relationships he has explored. His color isn't the non-color of so much latter day "Modernist" abstraction which favored weakened pastels over pure, strong hues. Rubin makes intense reds interrelate with sunny yellows, leaf greens and purplish blues. Indeed, his recent breakthrough *Red Variation Series* of 1987-89, which concentrated on the very difficult relationship between red and yellow, seems to have freed him to explore others of increasing difficulty and complexity. This series, which he likens to Bach's demonstration pieces, the *Goldberg Variations*, enabled him to consolidate what he'd gained from the art of the

いうより強調するも
界の引力、(彼自身の
面張力との交叉がル
ろのアクリルが使わ
に置かれていく。指
たり、細く流し込ん
くっつける事もある
は自分の意志のまま
発した。

様々な顔料の塗り
行った。彼の色合い
世の抽象近代派のノ
色を組み合わせ、木
非常に難しい赤と黄
ーション・シリーズ
組み合わせに挑戦し
るゴールドバーグ・ハ
は、近年の芸術より
が出来た。

なぜこの様な感情
子供の頃、彼は紙に
収まりきらず隣の部
紙に画いていた。彼
語を語っている。テ
の大学院コースを通
出身の背景、平和と
う二重の責任と戦っ
の奉仕活動をし、こ
義者である宗教家マ
いる。大人になって
が大きくて暗い構造
た。70年代後半から
度と暗さを持った物
に拙劣な物になって
おいては変わりがない
80年代において徐々
リッチな感触となっ

immediate past with his private emotional reserves of strength.

Exactly what has fueled these reserves is not clear. In childhood, he found refuge from family turmoil in making marks on paper. He would draw sixty to seventy page-long paper scrolls that rolled out from one room into another. The marks he made on these scrolls told the story of his life in a language only he could read. As a teenager, a college student, and, after, doing graduate work in Theology at a seminary, he struggled with his dual heritage as a protestant and a Jew and with his dual responsibility to work against the war and for peace and civil rights. He tried to reconcile these dualities in human service while continuing his personal search for faith, and the writings of religious existentialist Martin Buber have been of help in this endeavor. As an adult, difficulties in his personal life, led at first to closing off the visual field, filling it with larger and darker structural units that literally walled him off from the viewer. The works of the late seventies and early eighties reached asphalt-like density and darkness. The marks he made were primitive and deliberately infelicitous. He began working in wax encaustic which continued the density, but its natural luminosity encouraged a return to color. Slowly, as the eighties progressed he began to open his painting up to the light and to an increasingly rich texture of formal relations. Sparks of enlightenment from religious, philosophical, and scientific fires within him began to kindle flames in his painting.

A powerful, total commitment to relationship as reality in the sense that it was propounded earlier in this century by Martin Buber dominates Michael Rubin's approach to making paintings. The relationship of figure to ground is elemental to every picture, but it is constantly changing. As in so much non-Western art, lateral relationships of substance and void create rhythmic sequences which move the viewer through the painting. These relationships change with each additional cluster of marks, each added layer of pig-

閃き、科学的な炎が彼の絵

この世紀の初期にマーチ
係への強固なる完全心服が
めている。どの作品におい
が、それは常に一定してい
体と空の横の関係がリズム
る。マークの集合体、顔料
て行き、ついにその関係が
成する。顔料、密度、重さ
とルビンは再度要素を付け

物体と大地の関係は作品
縦横、大小、静動、曲線・直
関係もルビンの作品の中に
と作品は完成する。解決
のが作品の中で見易くな
エイブズ・チョイス等の作
1990年作のフィールド・イ
より多くのより繊細な感
係が解きにくくなってい

特にルビンの精神的傾向
のが適当である。道教の
観点から、筆や墨でさえ
があるとしている。方法
瞑想的なアプローチを取
いる事が明らかとなる宇
性質が自然に発露し、墨
力を越えた外界の力との
由にさせている。乾燥顔
の幾つかは金か銀である
の起伏を通過する時神秘
の顔料の固まりより生じ
生み出す。絵の具を自由

1990年の非常に堅く入
ド・オブ・ザ・ビギニングの
リエーションを激しく描

ment, and in the end the picture is "in focus" - - finished - - when the relationships are all absolutely equivocal. Adding more pigment, more density, more weight in one area will throw the picture out of focus, and Rubin will have to start again working the added elements up to this state of equivocality.

But then figure/ground is only one kind of relationship in any given work. Dark/light, hot/cool, horizontal/vertical, large/small, dynamic/inert, curvy/straight, smooth/jagged, and sweet/sour relationships are worked out in Rubin's paintings as well. When they are all resolved, the painting is finished. When this happens relatively early in his dialogue with the painting it is usually easier to see the separate relationships in action. *Red Ice*, a 1989 painting, and *Avi's Choice*, 1990, are relatively easy to read in this regard. Later in a given painting's life, when more and finer-textured layers have been added in order to reach a point of resolution and focus - - as in *Field Illusions*, 1990, for example, these building-block relationships are harder to discern.

Again an analogy with Oriental art is appropriate, especially in light of Rubin's spiritual tendencies. Chinese painters influenced by Taoism see everything in the universe, even the brushes and the ink they use, as having inherent essences not fully under their control. By taking a semi-detached, meditative approach to both method and materials they enter into the elemental spirit of the universe in which collective forces are revealed as purposely unified. By allowing the basic qualities of their materials and means to assert themselves - - to let ink flow and brush fly - - the artist can achieve a state of total accord between personal will and external forces beyond control. Rubin lets the pigment do what it naturally does. Dry pigment is dusted on the surface, some of it gold or silver in the Japanese manner, and the metallic pigments shift mysteriously from light to shadow as they course over the terrain of his textured field. The build up of surface topography itself causes shadows

投じる様に、身を青と緑よりも暑く見える。ブ
えないが、ブルーズはビ
ムを思い起こさせる。
い過ぎる。グリーン・
こったかが解り絵が描
ンバスの作品である。
れ、スパチュラで削る
キング、投げ出された
塗り。作品は究極的に
気を感じさせる。

彼の若々しい作品と
まの巻物や日本の屏風
き、東洋的な外観をルビ
又は方向性をもった流
のであるが、時には彼
ウト・オブ・ブラックの
動し、暗闇が侵入する
密度の濃い顔料の固ま
場合もある。作品は中
れをなぞっている。し
部への強調の度合は余
作品コントラストも不
としては、紫、緑、黄
観を持っているからで
かかわらず雪を背景と
の芸術家は物のエッセ
た。著名なタング・チ
にならないが、又山や
言っている

マイケル・ルビンは
いや彼は物を外に引き
れたアイデアの網、彼
エネルギーの安定した
の表現となる。ルビ
に絵画その物である事
事にしても、どこにと

and unexpected optical effects as well. The more he lets the painting paint itself, the more idiosyncratically his own it seems.

After the rigors of painting twenty-five *Red Variations*, which were culminated appropriately in 1990 by *End of the Beginning*, a very densely interwoven labyrinthine two-part canvas, Rubin threw himself into blues and greens like a thirsting man at a water source. Blues dominate *Red, White and the Blues* to the point where they almost seem hotter than the reds. *Breathing Blues* does seem fully aerated, but the "blues" put one in mind of Debussy and Mallarmé rather than Billie Holiday's singing. The atmosphere seems too clarified for a night club. *Green Mist* is another of those more transparent canvases in which it is possible to see what came before what and therefore to partially relive the process of the painting's making in the process of viewing it. Tonal underpaintings, covered with pourings of color setting up a vertical orientation which is then counteracted by sidewise and curving wriststrokes of the spatula, then stick- or finger-made markings, and thrown, thread-like skeins and spatters of color. The painting ultimately feels cool and moist, as though it would be more welcome in a desert than the tropics.

It is not surprising, given his youthful drawings and his mental set, that some of Rubin's paintings have a decidedly Oriental appearance, a narrative left to right kind of activity which reminds one of the unrolled scrolls of China and the folding screens of Japan. For the most part this feeling of a movement or directional flow, a swelling and diminishment in the densities, a heightening of the hue intensity or its falling off is almost subliminal, but sometimes it is explicit, as happens in one very long, thin, narrow painting which he keeps for himself, *White out of Black*, that moves out of darkness into yellow-highlighted whites, then is "interrupted" by a large dark mass of dense pigment before going through a rainstorm of bluish-grays that lead to a sunstruck final area of encroach-

数年に及ぶ制作活動の中そ
界に与え得る物はこれしか
瞬間、瞬間に表現する事で
しいと言う事は、他の人に
人的な状況である。」いつ
味を持つのは結果である。

ing darkness. The painting follows the irregularly peristaltic flow typical of Chinese scrolls. *U235A, Against the Dragon* has a somewhat similar, though much subtler, flow and central emphasis. *Contrast* of 1989 has a strangely Oriental feeling as well, largely because of its black and white look despite the interspersals of purple, green and yellow. One thinks of flocks of geese or bamboo against the snow even though there is absolutely nothing anthropomorphic in the painting. The Oriental artist was intent on capturing the essences of the things of the world - - but abstractly: "Painting is no equal to mountains and water for the wonder of scenery; but mountains and water are no equal to painting for the sheer marvels of brush and ink," said the great Tung Ch'i-ch'ang.

Michael Rubin isn't intent on capturing the world to imprison it in his paintings. No. He wants to let things out. His feelings, the tangled web of ideas that fill his mind, the surges and countersurges that wash over his body, the steady beat of his energy, the drives

that peak and then ebb, find an outlet, find expression in his paintings. It's a moral matter to Rubin that his paintings are pure paintings, free of representation, free of symbolism, free of message, free simply to be paintings. His concern is with putting paint on a surface, but not just any surface or any kind of paint and not just any which way. All the decisions which went into Rubin's twenty odd years of making art and which go into every moment of making it today were and are made in the interest of expressing himself in exactly the way that feels right to him because that's the only way an artist can give anything to the world. Franz Kline once said that "to be right is the most terrific personal state that nobody is interested in." He was right, as usual. What people *are* interested in are the results.

April Kingsley
New York, New York
1990