



Richard Caldicott, *Untitled #164, 2000*,
color photograph, 50 x 40".

RICHARD CALDICOTT

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GALLERY

Richard Caldicott photographs Tupperware. This might sound like an interesting new form of social deviance, but what's more intriguing, at least initially, is that the photographs look very much like Color Field paintings. Their rectangles, concentric circles, and squares hovering inside large rectilinear frames have been compared to the fields of saturated color in the canvases of Rothko and Newman (in the latter's case separated by vertical "zips").

Questions arise immediately: What is it to make a photographic version of a Color Field painting? And what does it mean to employ Tupperware to this end? While

Newman and Rothko worked with a medium as old as Paleolithic cave art, Caldicott uses the come-lately medium of photography, making work that seems, well, *easier*. We know it took Rothko a considerable amount of time to turn out a painting, and art lore imagines that the cumulative effort of channeling Nietzsche, Jung, et al. into those canvases drove the artist to suicide. The works in this show, on the other hand, were culled from a series of more than two hundred photographs Caldicott has taken in just a few years. How could a camera and Earl Tupper's dopey line of American plastic products enable an artist to reach the heights of sublimity without sustained, soul-searching exertion and its ill effects? Granted, Caldicott's vision is less grandiose: His is a Color Field for the digital age, brushstroke-free, bright with designer hues, complete with mass-produced subject matter. In fact, perhaps the artist he most resembles is Josef Albers, who methodically (and without histrionics) created hundreds of panels for his "Homage to the Square" series, a body of work that is often seen as the first discrete serial work of art.

This exhibition did a smart job of conveying how Caldicott's own series has evolved. Earlier works like *Untitled #42, 1998*, a composition of orange concentric circles (which turn out to be nested plastic bowls), have white backgrounds and conspicuous horizon lines formed either by the seams of fused panels or by the edges of the containers themselves. These works are often so abstract it's difficult to identify the subject. As the series progresses, the color becomes stronger. Midseries works like *Untitled #93, 1999*, are more

saturated, and the background is no longer white but blue and green. Here the worn edges of the containers are also evident, revealing the subject for what it is. The latest work in the series, *Untitled #202, 2001*, completes the transition from light to dark background and subdued to deep color. It also marks a return to complete abstraction: The aqua ellipsis at its center bears no resemblance to a piece of plastic destined for the fridge.

A few works fall flat: The blue-and-white *Untitled #62, 1998*, looks a little too much like an artsy product shot. And this, you realize, is where Caldicott may have a hard row to hoe; modernist painting never had to worry about looking like advertising. But unlike other contemporary Color Field devotees—Jeremy Blake, for instance, who uses actual digital images (the manna of advertising media) to create screens of ever-changing hue—Caldicott has a reverence for formal issues comparable to that of any modernist. Hence his devotion to his unorthodox material: Tupperware works because it's colorful, translucent, and organically geometric. Caldicott's earnestness urges us to acknowledge that while Color Field originated as painting, its legacy is hardly medium-specific.

—Martha Schwendener