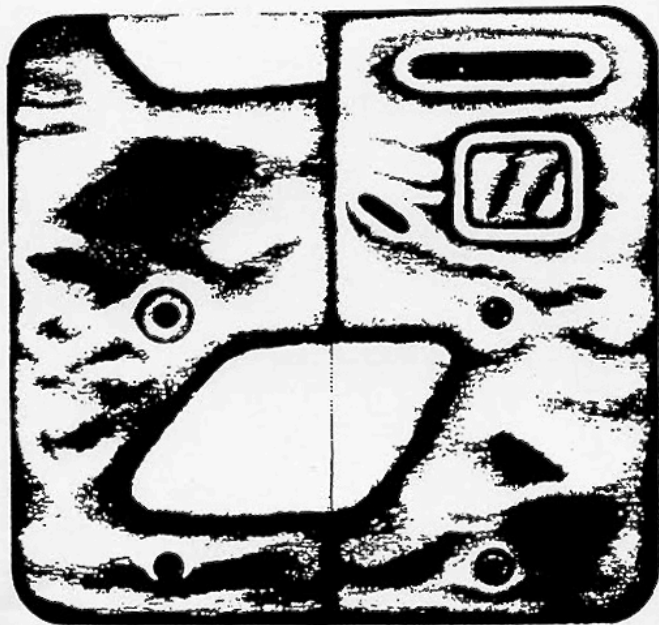


Review of Exhibitions

NEW YORK



Ti Shan Hsu: *On a Clear Day*, 1985, acrylic, enamel and concrete on wood, 90 by 96 inches; at Pat Hearn.

Ti Shan Hsu at Pat Hearn

It is natural to wonder what painting will look like at the turn

of the 21st century. Perhaps it will evolve out of an ideal meeting of technology and spirit and will truly aspire to universal comprehension. If that is to be the case, then the work of Ti Shan Hsu could be considered prophetic, a harbinger of the future. These paintings of colored concrete, oil stick, alkyd and enamel on wood panels might be topographical maps of Saturn, plans for a surrealist Oriental garden, or perfect artwork for the walls of the starship *Enterprise*. They look like nothing I've ever seen.

Part of the appeal of Hsu's work, other than the skill with which it is made, is the gravity-defying orientation of all elements in the paintings. Despite the heaviness of the materials Hsu uses, all his forms seem weightless, suspended or frozen in space. Though he generally avoids direct references to nature, there are occasional simplified shapes that appear to be remnants of more complex, recognizable ones. In *Blue Blood*, a modified, angular gold animal head (resembling a bull) with a single black "eye" hovers above several lozenge-shaped mounds whose centers are dug out, revealing a gritty, chewed-up core inside. A fragmented head with a green eye, parts of legs, arms and a foot dispersed on a fleshy pink background comprise

the individual units of *The Window and Door of the Seated Nude*. In the upper left corner a thick, textured area of sky-blue, gouged with fingers or a blunt tool, gives the piece the look of a partially uncovered primitive burial site.

The majority of the paintings, however, despite their biomorphic shapes, are nonreferential, though their titles might lead one to believe otherwise. Such works as *Pregnant Plus*, with its large central mound that looks like a life preserver, and *Head*, a small, pink symmetrical composition that has two dark "eyes" and a pair of blue-gray lumps above and below them, imply that Hsu may either start with an image in mind or arrive at his titles after the fact. In either case, Hsu apparently does not choose to separate himself from traditional themes, no matter how obscure his sources may be.

There are several paintings that don't follow this pattern. In *The Cross Product of Madame X*, the only horizontal work shown, six forms, each of a distinct character and color, are evenly distributed. Some of the color from these odd forms bleeds into the vivid yellow-orange background. With the original black enamel surface methodically scratched away to the edges of the painting (as it is in all of Hsu's pieces) to reveal the glowing colors underneath, *Madame X* is a delicate balance of color and shape that gives the work a meditative, quiet persuasiveness.

The diptych *On a Clear Day*, Hsu's most ambitious composition, is a playful mix of striated, mottled, brightly colored rhomboids, ovoids, assorted illusionistic gashes and holes, and what could be a lacerated cough drop. The pseudo hills and valleys and bleeding color add to the visual pleasure of traveling in, out and around the painting. The piece has a rhythm and fluidity, a freedom of movement that is decidedly different from the static quality of several of Hsu's other works. A little more bounce, and Hsu's paintings might really take off.

—Robert G. Edelman