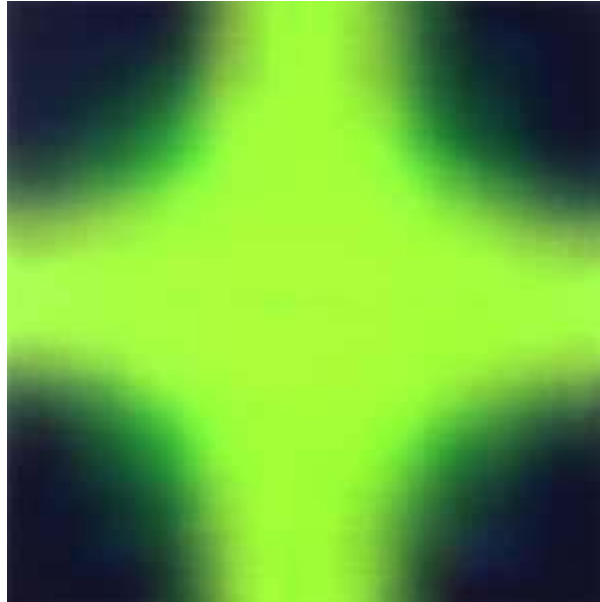


WESTERN ★ PROJECT

Los Angeles Times

Friday, December 24, 2004
Around the Galleries E38
By Holly Myers

HARD TO LOOK AT, YET ABSORBING



The painting that hangs in the entryway of Eric Freeman's exhibition at Western Project, opposite the front door, is a vibrant 8-foot-by-8-foot horizontally stratified field of orange, pale and luminous across the center and fading gently toward brown at the top and bottom. It's a smooth, warm and inviting work; moving toward it into the gallery feels like walking into a sunset.

The other four paintings, all comparable in size and hung squarely on the four walls of the gallery's main space, are similarly luminous but less organic in tone. Stepping into the space between them is a comparatively electrifying experience.

One features four vertical, neon-toned bands – pink, orange, blue and green – against a black ground; another, three horizontal bands – two thick, one thin – of silvery white. A third consists of a massive, neon green cross; the fourth, a large blue square fading at the edges into green, then black, then bright yellow around the circumference of the canvas.

All the works, though composed solely of good old fashioned oil paint, seem quite convincingly to pulsate. None of the shapes lay flat on the canvas: The cross and the bands give the impression of bulging outward, while the blue square appears to sink toward the wall. They resonate with the soft, steady buzz of gallery lights, and it's easy to suspect, standing in the middle of the room, that you've been caught in some sort of electromagnetic crossfire. They're difficult to look at yet irresistibly absorbing.

It is to Freeman's credit that such clever optical trickery doesn't function as an end in itself but carries the work toward a sort of sublimity. Though clearly indebted to Rothko, Turrell, Irwin, Flavin and the other Minimalists, it's a particularly contemporary sublimity, informed as much by the glow of computer monitors and cell phone screens as that of a sunset.

WESTERN ★ PROJECT

For immediate release:

Eric Freeman
New Paintings

October 30–December 30, 2004

Reception for the artist: Saturday, October 30 th 5-8pm.

Western Project is proud to present Eric Freeman's third solo exhibition in Southern California . Freeman is a native of Long Island and works year round in his studio in Sagaponack , New York . He has shown in Stockholm , Budapest and New York , at the Mary Boone Gallery.

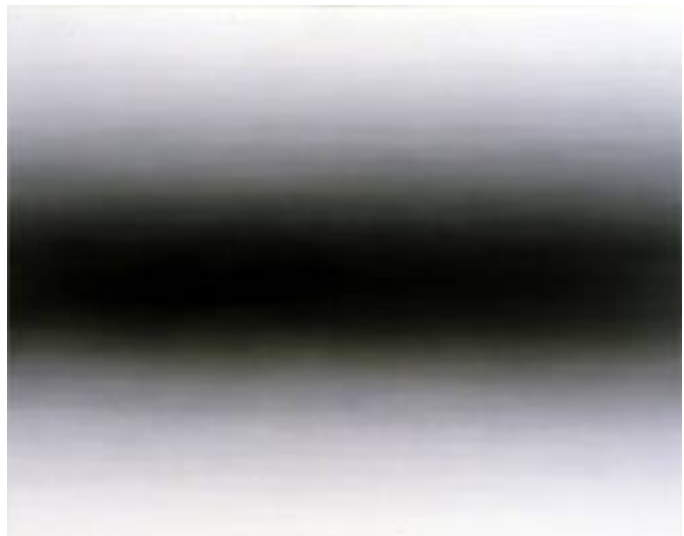
The show will consist of five monumental paintings; different architectural compositions – each visionary and emblematic. Previously, Freeman referred to landscape in his paintings. This body of work references modernist abstraction: Flavin, Leger, Newman, and Turrell. Freeman tweaks historical classicism with his insistent color and bold compositions, giving the work a hyper-contemporary appearance. He has created works which optically bend the edges of the canvases, creating immense sculptural fields of light. It is the radiance of Freeman's color that creates the content – tunnels of light, singular and intersecting, emphatic in scale (eight and nine feet square), demanding and producing an ecstatic beauty. Each work is a visual tremor, recalling Rothko, Hendrix, Melville and other historic artists who saw the illusion and connection of the human and natural world with awe.

A Rarified Air

by Sharon Edelson

WWD, Monday January 27, 2003

eye



New York - Eric Freeman's diffuse paintings are not unlike the artist himself. Stand back and you see bands of hazy color. Get closer and you see their construction and feel the hand and compassion of the artist. But the paintings - and Freeman - never completely come into focus.

Their beauty comes from "the volatile mix of the ineffable and the physical," writes Ross Bleckner, the Minimalist artist who has been a friend and mentor to Freeman since he took up the paintbrush, in an introduction to the catalog for the upcoming show of Freeman's work at the Bjorn Wetterling gallery in Stockholm . "The beauty of these paintings is that they so succinctly and clearly seem to reconcile those two worlds."

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Nursing a cup of hot chocolate in a SoHo cafe on a frigid day, Freeman, 32, is surprisingly self-composed for a young artist on the cusp of a career turning point. The Wetterling show opens Thursday and will be followed by a solo show at the MARY Boone Gallery here in September. His paintings are collected by people like Kelly Klein and Stormy Byorum, and his company is sought by Calvin Klein and Bob Colacello.

Yet Freeman is unpretentious, even slightly apologetic, about his growing success.

"I've been painting seriously for 10 years," he says. "I wasn't an overnight sensation. People want instant recognition. They're part of the scene and want to be hot really fast, which is fine. That's not really my thing so much."

Freeman's paintings, which have elicited comparisons to James Turrell's Minimalist sculptures and Robert Ryman's monochromism, are influenced by the light and flatness of East Hampton, where he works in a studio near the airport. His paintings are abstract and atmospheric, at times suggesting misty clouds and fading light. Some of the large-scale canvases have deeper bands of color vibrating across the surface.

"I like bright colors and colors that are a little bit artificial looking," Freeman says. "I want them to seem at first very natural and then to seem inorganic. They pulsate a little. When I start a painting I have an idea of a certain sensation I want to convey. As the painting evolves, it kind of takes on a life of its own. It becomes a fantasy. It's not concrete, it's a little more intangible."

Colacello, who lives near Freeman's studio and who included Freeman in his book, "Studios By the Sea: Artists of Long Island's East End," describes the paintings as "cool and abstract and minimalist on the surface, but I know there's a lot of emotion under there. I've really grown very fond of him and I've really seen depth in him. He's a real person in a world that's increasingly fake."

Freeman met Bleckner in 1993 while he was working as an assistant for the art director Sam Shahid. After being introduced, Freeman became intrigued with the process of painting and visited the older artist's studio almost daily during his lunch hour. "I'd take out these little canvases and play around," he remembers. "Finally I set up a little table in his studio and worked there. Ross really encouraged me. He thought my paintings were good."

"I was always interested in painting, but never thought it would be possible to do this for a living," adds Freeman, who seems a little lost when he's doing anything other than painting, according to friends. "That's where Ross was extremely helpful. He showed me how to be an artist."

Freeman knows that his friendship with Bleckner inspires jealousy in some corners of the art world, but he doesn't dwell on any of that. Besides, he says, he's paid his dues -- and then some.

"People can say what they want," he explains. "I've had to work twice as hard. In the end, the work speaks for itself."