

Arts: Patsy Krebs' Show at GTU Explores the Boundaries

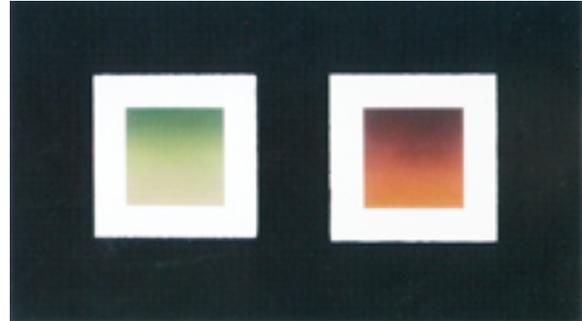
By Peter Selz

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One of the most beautiful exhibitions to be seen hereabouts in a long time is currently on view at the library of the Graduate Theological Union on Holy Hill (2400 Ridge Road) in Berkeley, a venue that has mounted fine art exhibitions for over 30 years.

The artist, Patsy Krebs, has had almost 40 solo exhibitions, and shows regularly at the Haines Gallery in San Francisco, but this is her first in the East Bay. On the walls and in the display cases of the library, the viewer encounters contemplative watercolors, paintings whose subtle color relationships induce contemplation.

It is always difficult to find words in the discussion of abstract painting, as the work strikes the viewer on a pre-verbal level. Krebs's recent work belongs to the tradition of geometric abstraction, going back to the early 20th Century masters Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian, transmitted at mid-century by Josef Albers's luminous squares and Mark Rothko's vibrating rectangles, which defied geometry.



Among the pictures on display are four pieces of layered watercolor and acrylic on paper, mounted on panel, which are called "Elysion." Elysion in Homer is a beautiful meadow at the extreme end of the earth. The paintings are horizontal fields without limit, extending, it would seem, beyond space and time.

"Horizon," Krebs writes, "is both distance and boundary. It is as far as we can see in any direction, an edge of what is unseeable."

And, on the wall label, she also quotes the philosopher Martin Heidegger: "What is evident of a horizon, then, is but the side facing us of an openness which surrounds us." And, indeed, one of the "Elysion" paintings of the two horizontal planes in the dark browns and dark green-greys, recalls Rothko's canvasses, which affect a silent dialogue between painting and viewer.

On the library walls there are also several paintings called "Stepwells" that consist of squares, which emit color haloes and are embedded in larger squares of related color tones. In the display cases there are sequences of watercolors on hand-made paper and larger paintings, some of them luminescent, even though they are almost monochrome, and have poetic titles such as "Requiescat," "Vigil" and "The Hours."

At a time in which so much of the art we see is gimmicky, when we are confronted with public art of low wit, when much of the stuff flaunts high tech without human emotion, when our vision is overloaded with endless visual noise, it is difficult to tune into silent art such as Patsy Krebs' paintings, which can slowly change our perception, as we become aware of the subtle gradations of color and light. Each observer will respond differently to these paintings, depending on his/her own feelings and thoughts, which may well be the essential artistic experience.

"Patsy Krebs: A Decade" will be on view at the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, Graduate Theological Union, 2400 Ridge Road, through Sept. 22, featuring select works on paper, 1995-2005. A lecture and reception is scheduled for 5 p.m. on Sept. 22. Exhibit is free and open to the public during library hours. For more information, call 649-2500 or see www.gtu.edu.