

Patsy Krebs at Haines

"Ovum" is the title Patsy Krebs gave to the series of a dozen paintings in her recent show. The word's connotation of femaleness and generative vulnerability seems to make a kind of poetic sense when applied to these small, subtle paintings, which are individually named after the various birds whose egg color each seeks to mimic. These colors comprise careful layerings of thinned oil paint applied to canvases that are either 12 or 17 inches square.

A cursory glance might invite the use of the word "monochrome" to describe these works, for each of their pearlescent surfaces seems to be formulated from one very well chosen combination of tint and hue that conveys a radiant inner illumination. Closer inspection reveals that this chromatic note is in fact more of a visual chord composed of several similar and harmonious hues, some warm and others cool, so as to create a vibrating effect. It is at this point that the paintings' surfaces start to become eerily and delightfully unstable, their quietly divergent colors interpenetrating each other in an almost fugal way.

The most pronounced suggestion conveyed by these chromatic vibrations is not so much one of ovum, womb or birds' eggs as it is an echo of the satisfying plenitude represented by Melanie Klein's notion of the "good breast," that all-purpose signifier of unconditional maternal comfort and emotional refueling. This suggestion is underscored not only by the sweet milkiness of the paint, but also by concentric circles of a nearly imperceptible color shift that are centrally located in each painting, always perfectly squared by the edge of the canvas. All are whispering mandalas whose unassuming objecthood slowly transforms itself into a specter of psychic and material generosity.

—Mark Van Proyen

Patsy Krebs: View of "Ovum" painting series, 1999; at Haines.

