

1980 and more geometric ones from around 2000. The earlier examples, reminiscent of Frankenthaler and Poons, tend toward organic compositions growing out of an accretion of paint. Their muted palettes, in variations of rich grays and browns, are arrived at through a dense layering of bright, contrasting colors—yellows, pinks, sour-apple greens—that cancel each other out. Where the undertones are left uncovered they appear as bright-hued bursts. Ten of these pictures have tall formats, about the scale of a closet door, and the compositions loosely follow the drips and stains of a slightly askew vertical stripe running down the middle of each. *Boulder (Rocks in the Bed)*, 1979, with its ghostly geometric shapes emerging from grimy, pearlescent colors, has a surface that ranges from thin washes to bubbly encrustations, with pours of paint cracked along it like a parched riverbed. The painting looks like a cloudy aerial view of a landscape, with natural formations left behind by melting snows and receding lakes.

Unlike the more suggestive spaces of the earlier works, those created later strike a balance between collaged and brightly painted geometric shapes dotted with thick globs of gel medium. The emphasis is on structure, in both form and material, with pieces of canvas glued onto the surface and gel medium troweled on in ridged semicircles.

One of the most striking pictures was both the earliest and most recent in the show, *Just Above the Equator* (1975-2005), a rectilinear canvas banded at the top by a



Frank Bowling: *Boulder (Rocks in the Bed)*, 1979, acrylic on canvas, 78 by 68½ inches; at G.R. N'Namdi.

stripe, a wash of orange on the left and green on the right, and murky colors at the bottom. Dominating the center is a large swath of glued-on canvas featuring a viscous, upside down, green-and-magenta pour about 18 inches wide and 6 feet tall that has the gooey look of melted ice cream. The work manages to be both garish and quietly evocative and, like the retrospective itself, expertly mixes bold playfulness with a sense of slow, cumulative processing of material and thought. The painting leaps to the eye, with plenty to keep one looking for a long time.

—Julian Kreimer

Robert Richtenburg: *White Abstract*, 1957, oil on canvas, 28½ by 25½ inches; at Baruch College.



Robert Richtenburg at the Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College

This retrospective of the late Abstract Expressionist Robert Richtenburg (1917-2006) covered some 50 years of the artist's production, from paintings that reflect his flirtation with European modernism in the late 1940s, when he studied in New York with Amédée Ozenfant, to galvanized wire constructions

and tumbleweed-like spheres of the 1970s through '90s that seem borne on Fluxus and Minimalist currents. Coming under Hans Hofmann's tutelage in 1948, Richtenburg belonged to the circle of New York School painters, exhibiting, for example, in Leo Castelli's seminal "Ninth Street Show" in 1951.

Works of this period, such as the Hofmannesque *Ecce Homo II* (1950), in which bright, broad-brushed patches of color seem to jostle against one another in a composition organized around a central figurelike form, soon gave way to Richtenburg's developed style: heavy, often fuliginous paintings with surfaces built up of several layers of pigment, sand and/or applied canvas strips. In these works paint is typically scraped away in places to reveal underlayers of racy zips and poured or dripped colors. Some canvases bear a superficial similarity to the abstract paintings of Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko, but the way one layer occludes another serves as a material analogue to scenes from the world that, through clouds or dark night, are only dimly perceived. Such is the effect in the nearly all-black, tenebrous *Slumber* (1950), in which a Goyaesque violence seems buried beneath the intensely expressive surface. *Lactescence*, of the same year, is creamy yellow and white but hardly any airier,

with affixed shreds of canvas and sand creating shadows on a pitted and textured surface as empty as a moonscape.

Whereas in those works the materials responsible for the built-up surfaces are subordinated to an allover effect, in *Proclamation* (1952) the garish canvas is punctuated by several blackened or burnt small plastic dolls. Apocalyptic in feeling, it seems the result of a tremendous explosion, with the dolls floating along with affixed rags of canvas in pools of paint on the sooty surface. In later works, Richtenburg arrives at a more subtle, less Manichean, relationship between bright colors and the somber overpainting. In *Syria* (1959) and *Blaze* (1961)—a monumental (90-by-80-inch) work—the colors emerging through the scraped black surface suggest fire behind dense smoke, or light seen through a thickly leaded stained-glass window. In other works of this period, this flat black skein becomes more systematic, as in *Homage to Valéry* (1960), in which, inscribed with text, it has been transformed into a geometric grid of repeated identical units through which high-key colors emerge. Such seriality survived into the 1980s in Richtenburg's work in a range of nontraditional mediums, as in *Light Question* (1981), a tactile sheet of transparent plastic impressed with regularly spaced ovals, each slightly irregular in shape: an image, perhaps, of human peculiarity or uniqueness accommodated within a rigid and ordered routine.

—Jonathan Gilmore

Nicola López at Caren Golden

For this exhibition, titled "Over-Growth," Nicola López produced mixed-medium works on paper depicting structures and landscapes scarred by rampant technological growth, lack of maintenance and random industrial disaster. She also recycled some of these images to create installation pieces. In the drawing *Overgrown* (2006), topsy-turvy lines and color washes coalesce into a disorienting, circular narrative of unstable steel structures verging on disintegration, including storage tanks and pipelines spewing forth brownish muck. The drawing describes a system of energy transfer that uses more power and materials to

Copyright of Art in America is the property of Brant Publications, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.