

REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

Ron Ehrlich at Stephen Haller

Painter Ron Ehrlich dedicated this show of splashy, slashing paintings to the late Stanley Kunitz, a noted visionary poet. Ehrlich's splotches, splatters, sprays, drips and spills enact a visual correlative to the poet's words. A thoroughgoing expressionist, Ehrlich is given to an ecstatic use of color, achieved with both blowtorch and brush. But the paintings are more than mere explosions of hue. They also incorporate an intuitive structure derived from preserving the history of each painting's creation. By working this way, Ehrlich aligns himself with a tradition of the New York School, whose lively gestures form part of his vocabulary.

Ehrlich often drives his point home with a form that dominates the composition. The 9-foot-square *Drift*, 2005-07 (all works oil and mixed mediums on panel), features a jagged white diagonal that moves from lower left to upper right;



Ron Ehrlich: *Stryk*, 2007, oil and mixed mediums on panel, 48 x 84 inches; at Stephen Haller

it resembles nothing so much as a lightning bolt crossing the sky. Its poetic resonance is intensified by the yellowish field extending behind it, while the top, mostly a rust red, and the black bottom portion frame the painting's barely contained energy. *Stryk* (2007, 4 by 7 feet) has an equally energetic and volatile surface. Drips punctuate a yellowish-red field that takes up roughly the upper two thirds of the painting; a black area below is activated by splashes of white paint. A broad slash of white curving down from

the upper left seems to signify spiritual energy; one remembers that Ehrlich spent several years in Japan (1979-83) studying ceramics, which must have helped shape his sensitivity to materials.

Working in layers and leaving each transparent to the pattern of gestures that preceded it, Ehrlich makes exuberant paintings that acknowledge their pasts, both those that are particular to the making of each work, and those that pertain to the history of his medium.

— Jonathan Goodman