

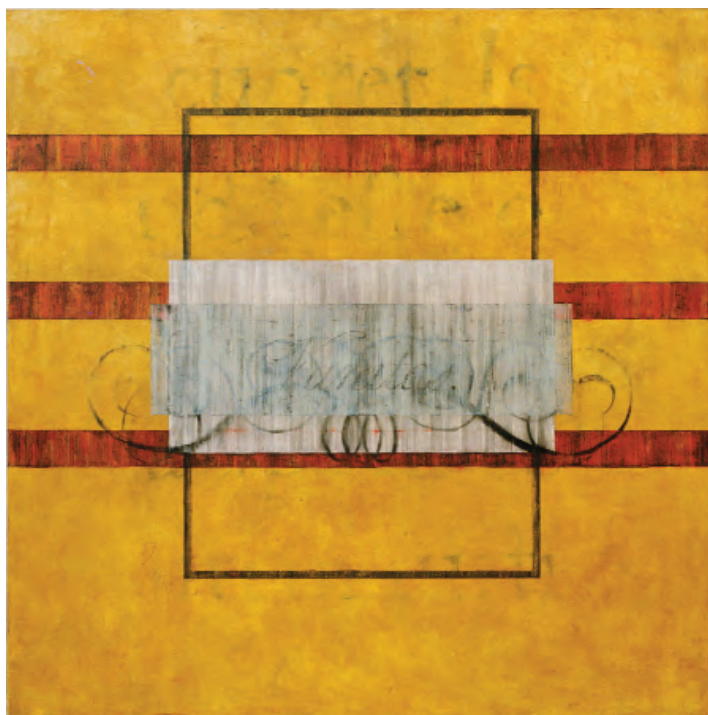
ART & ANTIQUES

Grace Notes

Contemporary artists salvage elegant shards from centuries past.

By George Melrod

At once elegant and austere, the paintings of Gregory Johnston are steeped in history. They draw both their distilled geometries and their muted palettes -- misty silver-grays, translucent burgundies, rich burnt siennas, and aged ochres -- from the formality of heraldic design. But these luminous, orderly, color-fields are merely backdrops; the central players are snippets of calligraphy. These fragments are not so much literal quotations as they are icons of textual beauty and authority. "I used to use mostly Latin; now I'm evolving my own font, my own text," Johnston explains. "I've realized that saying less is so much more. I'm interested in the power of ambiguity, of what text represents." Johnston's "weathered" surfaces are created with multiple layers



of wax-enhanced oil paint. His forms are applied by hand, not through stencils or silk screens. "I think that draughtsmanship, in the classical sense, is incredibly important," Johnston muses. Precise as they are, his laconic paintings -- like *Lateran*, shown at left -- shimmer with mystery. At Stephen Haller Gallery in New York City, September 27 until October 25.

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