

Art in America

Dan Christensen and Ronnie Landfield at Salander-O'Reilly

February 2001

Taken together, the works of Dan Christensen and Ronnie Landfield suggest the multiple legacies of Color Field painting. In Christensen's paintings, a formalist sensibility seems to have been invaded by cosmic forces. Dark grounds are enlivened by white lines which suggest waves of sound or energy radiating mysterious force fields, and white marks bleed into the murky darkness or skitter over the dark ground like electron traces in a cloud chamber. Sometimes the white lines ricochet in circular motions; others emanate from floating geometric forms that are pierced by flatly painted openings.

Space is ambiguous in these paintings, which incorporate disparate elements from Christensen's earlier work. In several paintings, floating white disks painted in perspective lead the eye into a traditional proscenium space. Other compositions are essentially flat, with only a hint of ethereal space wafting beyond the aqueous layers of white or colored paint. Repeatedly, odd juxtapositions of solid form and bleeding line make for an uneasy balance between the concrete and the illusory, conveying the sympathetic viewer to a realm beyond ordinary experience.

Landfield, by contrast, guides us to more recognizable territory. Though fully abstract, his piled patches of pure color bring to mind rainbows, rolling hills, layers of clouds, sunsets and other natural phenomena. Contributing to the landscape associations is Landfield's frequent use of a horizonlike line. In *The Deluge*, expanses of dark blue, red and yellow seem to crash up against each other, creating a brooding, ominous all-over composition. More typical, however, are paintings like *What Words Don't Say* and *What Gauguin Said*, which are built up of luscious golds, oranges and crimsons beneath canopies of watery blue.



Ronnie Landfield *On the Shoulder*, Acrylic on canvas, 42 x 34 inches

Generally, the light in these paintings seems to come from behind the colors, glowing through with a flamelike intensity. Thus, while the landscape references suggest a conventional pictorial space, the translucent colors provide another kind of depth, which one looks past as well as into.

Both these artists draw on the heritage of mid-century abstraction, but the emotional resonances they achieve could not be more different. Christensen immerses us in a realm of moody mystery; Landfield is all light-filled joy.

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