



Lloyd Martin, *Untitled*, 2000. Oil, mixed media on canvas, 72" x 66". Courtesy Stephen Haller Gallery.

Lloyd Martin

Lloyd Martin's minimalist paintings tread a thin line between reductivism's emphasis on integrity of surface and its exact opposite, the illusion of spatial depth. Or rather, the *allusion* of depth, for, like mirages that shimmer briefly then disappear, close inspection reveals that nothing literal is actually portrayed.

Martin bases his work on a classically minimalist architectonic substrate of horizontal lines etched into wet paint. The resulting wide bands - predominantly white - are then scarred by repeated rectangular motifs in black, sepia and ochre. These strokes make up the vertical axis of an implied grid, and break up the space with staccato beats in syncopated interludes that can be interpreted to reference everything from formalist painting concerns to abstracted windows on old buildings. An occasional organic shape might punctuate the surface as well, appearing out of nowhere like a portal to an alternate universe within the painting's interior. Martin's surfaces have the gritty, visceral patina of weathered walls, while the exposed underlayers seen through the "scars" - although resolutely non-objective - evoke ethereal scenes.

The latter allusions are strongest in two paintings that stray from the signature white. "Untitled" #4 has an overall color of barely-there pink that recalls the first delicate blush of dawn; a rarely seen but beautiful hue favored by Robert Motherwell, who contrasted it dramatically

against black. Here, the powdery blush is played against two breaks in the surface. In one area, painterly drips in ochre and rust from an earlier layer are allowed to show; a tantalizing passage that marks the process through which the painting evolved. In the other, a portal-like ovoid offers a glimpse into the darkest interior; the painting's heartbeat, which exposes a scumbled area that evokes the underbelly of piers where weathered wood meets water.

This and a darkly mysterious black painting are the most purely poetic works in the show, wherein expression becomes more the subject than sensuality of surface. The black work is curiously kinetic with its underlayers of radiant, ghostly lights and evocations of imagery. It exudes a profound sense of silence and aloneness associated with a sort of primal night, and recalls Ross Bleckner's early work with gloomy chandeliers and hovering lights that tolled for loss. There appears again the portal-like area, here partially obscured by black drips, as if it were painted with haze and black rain. Underneath it, water is again evoked, with what could be a loading dock in the ocher distance.

As with all of Martin's allusions to literality, the evocation in these works is strong, but it is just that; an evocation in counterpoint to the more formalist construct of the paintings.

Joyce B. Korotkin