

Art in America

APRIL 1994

**Nauman
Retrospective**

**Hodgkin,
Sheehan**

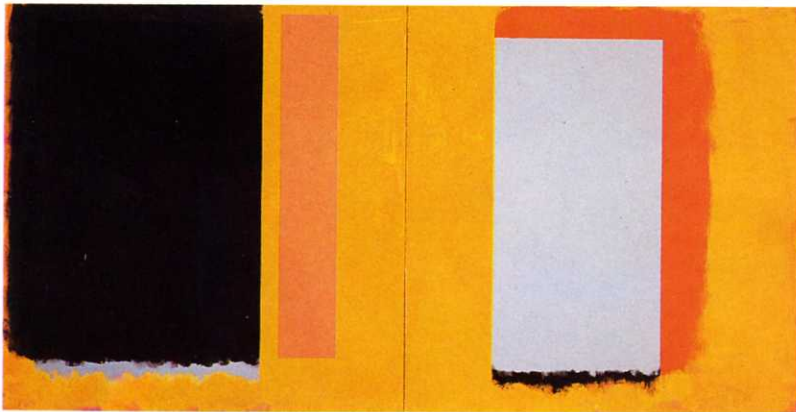
**The Gay
Agenda**

**Report from
Dallas**



\$4.95 USA

\$6.50 CAN £3.50 U.K.



Doug Ohlson: *50/50*, 1993, acrylic on canvas, 66 by 128 inches; at Andre Zarre.

jaw. The bottom teeth sit on plaster bricks on the gallery floor, held upright by a steel-wire brace.

The completeness of the set of teeth, the long, healthy roots and the milky white texture provoke a visceral response. Soon the nightmarish size of the teeth begins to suggest a huge and threatening eating machine—Cragg's commentary, perhaps, on our relentless consumption of the natural world.

The ecological-disaster subtext is also prominent in *Island*, a small work consisting of four small turrets which peak above a lumpy mass of dried plaster. It looks as if a bucket of wet plaster had been accidentally kicked over in the studio, yet the stranding of the crafted architectural elements within a diluvian landslide reads as symbolic of a larger situation.

In contrast to these sobering lectures, *Spirogyro* caps the show with a rare self-referential twist. In a masterful stroke, Cragg hangs his signature sand-blasted bottles out to dry on Duchamp's bottle rack, so to speak, assimilating a historical progression and staking his own place in it.

—Tom Eccles

Doug Ohlson at Andre Zarre

It would be difficult not to take pleasure in Doug Ohlson's bold, brilliantly colored abstractions; even at night, behind the glass of the gallery window, these dazzling acrylics packed enough candlepower to stop passersby. Once again, the artist's trademarks of a variety of rectangles and unmediated hues—in this instance, bright orange, coral, lipstick red, maroon, magenta,

hot pink, lime, deep green, sky and sea blue, and shades of yellow, ocher, gray and black—were on display. Although the volume has been turned up several decibels, perhaps in concession to current art tastes, Ohlson has marched to the beat of the same drummer for over three decades, a fabulously eccentric act in these days of rampant neophilia.

The exhibition consisted of six works on paper installed as a group on one wall and 10 paintings hung in adjacent rooms. The works on paper seemed to be studies, although most often for paintings not shown. They are quirkier than the canvases, less calibrated in their color resolutions and more muted in tonality. They are also more open in structure and communicative; *Payne's Pink* radiates the warmth of flesh.

The paintings—of large but not intimidating scale—are straightforward color practicums, refreshing in their candor and lack of cynicism. Descended from the geometric branch of New York painting, driven by formal, perceptual issues, this work, at times, verges on the decorative. This most recent collection consists of brushed grounds of layered, saturated colors; at the edges, the underlying colors can be glimpsed. Over this volatile, spatially ambiguous field, rectangular planes are set in strict vertical-horizontal alignment, sometimes far apart, sometimes touching or almost overlapping; vertical bars are then painted into the field and left suspended to hold the surface, forcing everything else behind them, and visually advancing to shift the spatial readings. The compositions,

including diptychs and a triptych, continue to resemble architectural collages of cut and torn paper. Characteristically, Ohlson balances hard edges with brushy ones, light with dark colors and matte areas with glossy; he also qualifies flatness through the creation of a shallow, optical space, reprising painting's dual status as real object and artifice.

Ohlson's wry sense of humor is evident in certain titles: for example, *Peep Show* seems to comment on its own imagery of overlapping planes, on the nature of painting, the relationship of painter to viewer and the viewer to painting, and on the institution of the gallery, functioning as a metaphor for self and otherness in general. *50/50* is not only descriptive—it's a diptych and relatively symmetrical—but might also be a jab at art-world economics. One of the best pieces in the show, it simply and effectively balances a large black rectangle against a smaller gray one and seems, among other things, to be a narrative about doors. Perhaps it is the door to the Law in Kafka's parable, which was impossible to enter although it stood open—an equivalent, Ohlson might be saying, to the beautifully impassive surface of painting.

—Lilly Wei

Arnulf Rainer at the Arnulf Rainer Museum

The Arnulf Rainer Museum opened quietly in September of last year opposite the Dia Center for the Arts, its dazzling white facade and magisterial red

doors standing out vividly against the blue of the sky and the drabness of its neighbors. Inside, more than 100 paintings by the Austrian artist are mounted in a vast, sky-lighted space partitioned into various-sized galleries which flow into each other and brim with four decades of work. Hung in a steady, if rather workmanlike, procession, this permanent exhibition includes the "Übermalungen" (Overpaintings), dense overpainted monochromes dating from 1954 through '75, the "Kreuz" (Cross) series, most from the late '80s onward, and recent angel paintings and pure gestural abstractions.

All of the works, however, might be considered overpainting, as colors, incidents, imagery, photographs and appliques have been variously obscured, annihilated, emptied or reconstituted. Rainer's method encompasses acts both secretive and revelatory, as much ecstatic play as calculated schizophrenia, part tease and part arcane rituals of iconoclasm, mortification and redemption. Even the objects occasionally attached to the surface of paintings, such as a clumsily made glove, a paw print constructed of separate wooden pieces, a baby monkey hand puppet (head limp, arms outstretched, pinned to the center of a cross like an evolutionary glitch), share the impulse to metamorphose.

The largest grouping is the cross-shaped paintings made of wood, a format he has used since 1956, which range from a



Arnulf Rainer: Installation view of recent work; at the Arnulf Rainer Museum.