

Art in America
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Gregory Amenoff at Alexandre

Gregory Amenoff's aim, consistent over three decades, has been to capture in his paintings the sublime feeling of awe before nature. This pursuit, recalling that of the Stieglitz group almost a century ago, is tackled with a dense, semi-abstract, painterly style that is indebted to them as well. Fortunately, this does not trouble him, and he brings full intensity to his craft, piling colors on colors and at times unleashing a full arsenal of modernist techniques in a single painting.

The show included two groups of work, larger paintings on panels, most just over 3 feet in each dimension, and smaller works on canvas, around 2 feet per side. It was illuminating to see in the smaller works how important the manipulation of paint is to Amenoff's success. As colors are layered and compositions are toyed with, the paintings build up a crusty surface that nonetheless conveys an unlabored refinement coming out of years of practice.

As do most of the works in the show, *Point Braque* (2006) presents an abstracted landscape, in this case a jigsaw puzzle of geometric forms that simultaneously flatten out onto the picture plane and recede into a rocky coastal scene. A dark gray and hot orange peak dominates the picture, jutting up from a bay into a pink-tinged sky traversed by a lemon-yellow rainbow. The Bonnardesque, acid colors and blocky, artfully clumsy brushwork succeed in giving the painting a physical presence that keeps one moving closer and farther away in order to gauge where the image becomes rich surface and where it snaps back into being a picture. There is a strong trace in these images not only of Dove, Hartley and the rest, but of video-game landscapes, with their clunky forms paralleling, rather than describing, the natural world. At any moment, the geometric armatures seem on the verge of loosening their bonds and spilling out into nonobjectivity.

This kind of painting has come back into fashion through artists like Peter Doig and, more recently, Amenoff's own student Dana Schutz. Like him, they place psychedelic and sometimes goofy abstraction in the service of figuration, but unlike theirs, Amenoff's work doesn't arrive at its emotion through irony or mediated distance. He heads right for the punch, with a total suspension of disbelief in the power of the medium to transmit profound experience.

Julian Kreimer