

FORD BECKMAN

Ford Beckman pays homage to the reductiveness of Minimalism and hard-edge painting, while celebrating the artist's presence with evidence of his own hand. Though Beckman is engaged in a dialogue with the past, his paintings are finely made and prove that powerful and engaging work can still be produced within the realm of geometric abstraction.

A thoughtful installation at Shafrazi introduced Beckman's formal vocabulary. Upon entering the gallery the visitor was confronted with a large painting. It is densely layered with white acrylic paint, wax, and varnish, creating a rich and textured surface. Signs of wear and marks of the work's making are evident throughout: staples and nails are exposed, paint is splattered over the surface, and, occasionally, a pencil scrawl appears. The other works at Shafrazi were variations on that single panel. The most intellectually engaging were paintings in which a dense coat of white paint covers an expanse of varnished surface, creating a dialogue of accessibility and concealment and providing a contrast between the weathered effect of the varnished surface and the slick, white skin that overlays it.

At Scott Hanson a series of black-and-white paintings raised similar issues of duality, suggesting a play of opposites: absence and presence, denial and possibility, expansion and contraction. In one painting a black square—Beckman's self-proclaimed symbol for modernism—hovers over the varnished surface, recalling the art of Malevich as well as more recent examples of geometric abstraction. The worked surfaces and rough quality of Beckman's paintings, however, bespeak a humanity that departs from the cool, theoretical ap-

proach to abstract painting that characterized the '80s.

In other pieces, Beckman has purged work of extraneous detail. The surfaces in one series are divided between expanses exposed, varnished plywood and overcoats of thick white paint. In another series of works, geometric constructions are built from pristine slabs of sheetrock. These are elegant works that depart from Beckman's established format and rely less on vocabularies of previous abstract artists and movements. Here Beckman seems to be moving in a new direction, one that carries him forward rather than into the past.

—Saundra Goldman