

Illumination II (interior)
by Michael Mazur

Touching Paint Into Light

Barbara Krakow Gallery
10 Newbury Street
Boston

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Wallace Stevens, articulating the modernism of mid-20th century poetry, claimed just such a shifting ground on which to stake his sensibility. In the poem *13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*, stanza 'V' proclaims:

*"I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after."*

Critic and poet John Yau has praised Michael Mazur as an artist who knows how to make "painterly marks which are both precise and redolent" and perhaps this ability is the crux of the strength that has allowed Mr. Mazur to make such diverse marks in so many media while still palpably rooted and growing.

In the latest of his series of shows at the Barbara Krakow gallery, 16 new works in acrylic, collage and mixed media demonstrate both a technical deftness and a quality of intuition which is easier to catalogue than to explain or interpret. Five abstract *Illuminations* numbered with precise Roman numerals speak a mostly curvilinear language whose syllables are inflected from painting to painting but seem, in themselves, unique evocations. *Illumination 1 (nocturn)* hovers at one pole against a sky of pulsating, refulgent blue and roots at its other pole into a viscous blue the depth of midnight. In between, so many shades of transition pass from one blue to another that this transition itself becomes an event of infinite progression and regression. The precision of the balancing shapes, one rooted, the other hovering is belied but not betrayed by the deliquescent blue which suspends them both—they seem to need each other as skeleton and flesh, container and contained.

In *Illumination 11 (interior)* there are lilting incandescent reds, tender pinks, fragile greens with shapes conjured by acrylic colors sprayed over paper cut-outs and floating in shifting depths of tangerine cool enough to drink or bath in. Here again, there is an intuition of symbioses, of opposites flourishing by dint of a long history of attraction and adaptation. The forms seem freshly minted, crisp, but the colors that enclose them have a depth that seems much too mature to have been minted yesterday, or yesteryear, for that matter. And, look again at those "crisp" forms to see them bleeding at their borders into a soup of multi-valent hues.

Likewise, Michael Mazur proclaims his allegiance to both the "before" and the "after" to the inflection and the innuendo. After trumpeting five acrylic-bright *Illuminations* from (*nocturn*) through (*space*), an almost portentously encyclopedic range, he shifts down to show four of his "studies" for these illuminations. For those of us who still move in a rational sequence from "low" to "high" or "better" to "worse," these studies are perplexing, since they seem no more "inferior" or preliminary than Wallace's inflections to his innuendoes, no less to be valued or devalued than Wallace's whistling *Blackbird* to the silence he hears just after.

But to hear this beauty of both the negative and the positive, the defined and the inchoate is an art of refined intuition, and to present it to your public demands an equally refined technique. The enormity of these demands on the sensibility and the craft of the artist have been much pondered. Mr. Mazur would claim no mastery, but we can hear his striving in these thoughts he wrote about the craft of the monotype, which he has been credited with reviving after being inspired by a 1968 show of Degas' monotypes at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum: "For in the monotype, as in other media, spontaneity is tempered by discipline; energy and expressive gesture by a certain detachment and control."

It is a delight to absorb in these sensuous colors and redolent forms the modulations of spontaneity and discipline, expressive gesture and control which ripple through Michael Mazur's new works in as seamless and provocative an amalgam as paint and purpose can achieve. For more information, call 617.262.4490 or visit barbarakrakowgallery.com.

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