



The abstract form in Michael Mazur's "Illumination II" (left) looks like a heart. "Illumination I" has at its center one stencil, applied twice, once upside down.

A successful experimenter

Michael Mazur shelves his brushstroke, but his rapturous tones remain

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Art lovers, particularly those with a passion for a specific artist's work, can be a fickle crowd. We impatiently wait for the next body of work, in which we hope to see some new evolution, some new clarity, some new risk taken. But if that next body of work looks nothing like anything our artist has done before, we may balk.

Michael Mazur, one of the finest painters in the Boston area, has taken such a leap in his new show at the Barbara Krakow Gallery. He's an artist known for his gestural energy, for brushwork that shows both delicacy and bravado. But he has also always been a restless experimenter, diving into different techniques (especially as a printmaker) with gusto.

A couple of years ago, Mazur had heart surgery. He couldn't paint in his hospital bed, so he took to doodling little linear abstractions.

"He wanted to get away from his signature brushstroke," gallery director Andrew Witkin reports. If that sounds close to Jackson Pollock abandoning the drip, it is.

Mazur turned to stencils, cutouts of abstract designs. He made collages with them, which became studies for largely spray-painted works. (The mere thought of Mazur with spray paint will gall some.) The exhibit follows his process from collage to canvas. It's interesting to chart the development of a single piece, but the large-scale, fully realized paintings are the works here that really grab you by the shirt collar.

The artist has not left his rapturous tones behind. Dreamy blues and heated reds provide the backdrops for abstract forms made from layered stencils, spray-painted onto the canvas. "Illumination I (Nocturn)" has at its center one stencil, applied twice, once upside down. The form could be that of a praying mantis attempting to swallow a pearl. Fleshy flowers — the top one yellow, the bottom one blue — curl around pale orbs. Their stems curl like clef notes. Occasionally, subtle brushstrokes activate the shifting blue background.

Michael Mazur

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,
10 Newbury St., through June 7.
617-262-4490, www.barbarakrakowgallery.com

I'm not balking. These are beautiful works; Mazur is probably temperamentally incapable of making a jarring, ugly painting. The abstract forms might refer to organisms; the one in "Illumination II (Interior)" looks like a heart. But this group of paintings feels like the first leg of a larger journey, as if he's still so buoyed by the new, refreshing scenery, he hasn't quite found a gait for the long haul.

Knowing where the artist has come from, it's hard to look at these new paintings and simply rest in them. They raise the question: Where is he going?

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