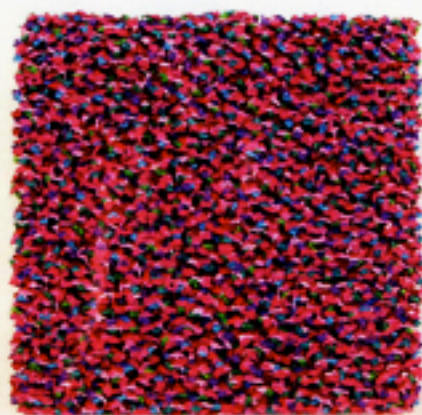


Art in America

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Robert Sagerman: 6,140, 2003, oil on canvas, 12 inches square; at Marcia Wood.



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Robert Sagerman at Marcia Wood

New York-based conceptualist Robert Sagerman is a young artist with degrees in painting, art history and religious studies. Even without understanding his intensely contemplative painting practice,

viewers can be hypnotized by his work's vivid iteration of color-field painting. In this recent show of 10 canvases, he also included a sort of "video ledger" on a small monitor next to one of the pieces.

Sagerman consciously recalls the painterly conceptualism of Alfred Jensen and Roman Opalka at the same time he practices a resolutely non-painterly approach influenced by Mel Bochner and Joseph Kosuth. But in appearance his works are richly textured, mottled fields of color. Sagerman applies thousands of dabs of oil paint with a palette knife and meticulously records the colors, the number of strokes and the amount of time spent on each color in a ledger for each painting. He typically names each piece after the number of strokes it contains. Though one might understandably expect the scale of each work to increase with the quantity of marks, there are examples in which only the density shifts. 2,782 (2004), for example, occupies the same 12 by 12 inches as 6,140 (2003).

The artist sometimes achieves a solid-color effect through the optical blending of five or more hues. 11,095 (2003) appears to be a textured black field from

across the room, but a closer look reveals distinct marks of blue gray, putty green, deep purple and mauve over white. *Hashmal* (2001), painted with smaller gestures in reds and greens, has the appearance of rust-colored, matted fur. Other paintings suggest gelato, with seemingly endless, tiny peaks of lime, pale yellow, red and pink.

Sagerman's complex accounting scheme essentially expands the conceptual dimensions of what might otherwise be seen as a strictly formalist process. When he translates his data into video, he presents an entirely new artifact that permits the viewer to enter the statistical obsession of his work. On a small monitor, tickers simultaneously tally data for the colors in a given painting: number of strokes per color, total number for the painting, minutes spent per color, total time spent on the work, and so on.

Perhaps the artist channels the systems of Jewish mysticism that he studied at New York University. To place abstraction in the realm of data collecting is to create an unanticipated encounter with the transcendent. Sagerman's paradoxical coalescence of beauty and information compels us to find fresh meaning in "painting by number."

—Cathy Byrd