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Tactility as Mysticism - Robert Sagerman at Margaret Thatcher Projects

By Franklin Einspruch
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According to **Margaret Thatcher Projects**, "From the beginning of his attraction to abstract painting, an interest in its sensed metaphysical content guided and influenced **Robert Sagerman**," who holds a PhD in Hebrew and Judaic Studies from New York University, and whose paintings are on exhibit at the gallery.

"As with any meditative process, his work appears deceptively simple: thickened oil paint is applied, one stroke at a time with a palette knife, in soft peaks to a canvas over a period of time, creating a heavily textured surface saturated in color. Yet it is through this painstakingly repetitive and seemingly simple process that Sagerman's work builds its gravitas, suspending a period of time and an emotional and spiritual state in his oils.



Robert Sagerman, 13,685, 2011,
Oil on canvas, 39 x 35 inches

"For all their sensuality and tactility, Sagerman's paintings are not merely a thicket of color to capture the eye. As he works, the artist maintains a log of the number of strokes in each painting, the minutes spent with each color, and the total time a piece takes to complete. This uniquely personal form of meditation stemmed from Sagerman's study of medieval Jewish mysticism, where the act of assigning numerical values to the letters of holy writings and the ritualized combining and recombining of these numbers brought the meditator closer to a state of divine clarity. This counting action most clearly defines Sagerman's objective for his work."

As Sagerman himself puts it, "For me, the numbers themselves are the most direct expression of my work activity; it is they that suggest the immaterial essence of the work."

"Robert Sagerman: It's Time" runs through February 15 at Margaret Thatcher Projects, 539 West 23rd Street, between 10th and 11th avenues, 212-675-0222, thatcherprojects.com.