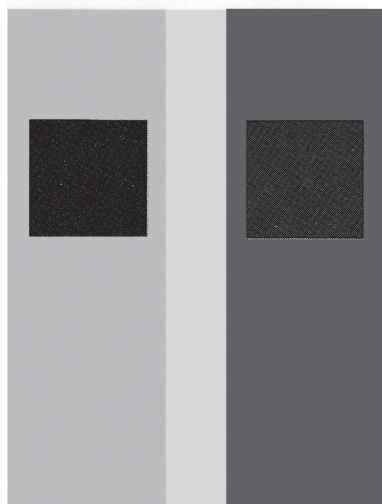


ARTFORUM

GARY HUME MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

It is a rare, bracing pleasure to see a bunch of canvases that look as if they had some reason to get up in the morning. The six geometric paintings in this exhibition, Gary Hume's first solo show in New York, are smart, physically unself-conscious, and direct. Hume, who is 29 and English, uses enamel lacquer paint, and he applies it as if with great, smooth, slurping, dog-tongue licks. He also defines the sharp edges of his vibrant rectangles of color with foam-tape, producing what might be described as a Precisionist's wet look. These paintings are funny. Ostensibly abstract, each work is actually a depiction of a door, and this fundamental pun—so dumbly matter-of-fact and yet so quirkily manifold as to suggest a veritable picaresque of architectonic postures, thresholds to be transgressed, potential



Gary Hume, *More Fucking Values*, 1991,
oil on panel, 87 x 67".

assignments, and abandoned *cartes de visite*—steers straight into the *comédie humaine*. Doors are, of course, figurative. They're scaled by us and for us, and very often they echo the configuration of the bodies they variously invite or exclude, protect or imprison. Indeed, Hume's humble pun on abstraction and representation extends all the way into portraiture proper. This is a key distinction between Hume and, for instance, Peter Halley and Andrew Spence, whose works also involve irreducible pictorial puns and architectonic motifs but never suggest this sort of loopy epic.

Hume's sly pun is explicit in two paintings in the show, both abstract door-portraits entitled *Jim* (all works 1991). I don't know whether they are of Jim's door or, obliquely, of Jim himself, or whether the artist is saying that Jim *is* his door, or the sum of his many doors, but in any case Jim is characterized by bright, perky, robin's-egg-blue, yolk-yellow, grape-purple, and orange-orange. Though one Jim is very large and made up of four panels, and the other is medium-sized and consists of only one panel, they share the same colors.

Hume's doorways are Symbolist as well. *Symbolic Representation of the Journey From the Cradle to the Grave and Beyond*, and *Representation of Journey From the Cradle to the Grave and Beyond, From Another Perspective* aspire to Blakean intensity and cosmic sweep. Their overlapping, interrelated, but nonidentical color-coding—eggplant, for instance, gives way to mauve, and clotted-cream to lemon-curd—reveals an attention to detail and the preoccupation with landscape and nature's cycles that have been hallmarks of the English tradition in painting since John Ruskin's time, at least.

Incubus, clearly another instance of Symbolism within Hume's oeuvre, is a large painting in which an array of rectangles of closely valued colors—so close they could smother you—lend a sickly effect to neorococo pinks that might ordinarily be called "cotton candy" and "ballet." *Incubus* is a youthful tour de force. So is *More Fucking Values*. It's black, white, and two shades of gray. It's tough. It's easy. It's mean. *More Fucking Values* is the angry-young-man door portrait in Hume's most excellent show.

—Lisa Liebmann