

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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ARTFORUM

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Terry Winters

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Terry Winters's series "Knotted Graphs," 2008, consists of eleven large abstract paintings—seven of which measure seventy-seven by ninety-eight inches—that, in their mood indigo, introduce, as it were, Jasper Johns to Henri Matisse. The works balance empyrean pleasure and sober order—a contrast struck by Matisse during his epochal struggle with Cubism in the teens of the previous century. Matisse's reconciliation of these antipodal approaches set an unsurpassed example for painting in modern times. So, while not breaking the mold, Winters's hard-won reprise of Matisse sounds a distinguished note at a moment when seriousness in art is confounded by the claims to seriousness made in the name of merely comfortable achievements, which these ambitious paintings are anything but.

Winters here works intuitively, producing figures resembling the parabolic form known as the Lissajous curve as well as "Turk's head" and other decorative knots and the path a plumb bob cuts through space as it seeks stasis, ultimately pointing to the earth's core. In his giddy arrangements, Winters creates alignments, superpositions, and interruptions, setting one figure against the other like devouring Pac-Men in a way that recalls Matisse's *Les Moroccans*, 1915–16, with its massive, ungainly forms, not to mention the more obviously related decorative *papiers collés* of his latter years. Need one add that the Lissajous curve is, in its way, for Winters, what the catenary is for Jasper Johns? The path of the Lissajous when stretched taut becomes the Harlequin's lozenge—as meaningful to Winters as it is to Johns, since it signals, across Picasso, a very fundamental index, an ur-form of modernism.

Lissajous figures also evoke the sequential spiraling patterns of plants and unfurling petals as recorded in Karl Blossfeldt's critical volume, *Urformen der Kunst* (Archetypes of Art, 1928)—an encyclopedic collection of natural forms that the diligent *Neue Sachlichkeit* photographer saw as fundamental to art. Leafing through these images, one encounters all the motifs found along Winters's painterly trajectory—from the isolated natural forms of his first mature paintings from the '80s to the pervasive indigo of these recent knots.

Winters was not then, nor is he now, a facile painter; indeed, his brushy, scrubbed touch conveys a choked authenticity that distinguishes his work from easy pattern making. Rather than rediscovering just

another neat grid or monochrome rectangle, Winters, like Cubist-era Matisse, "finds" his paintings through hands-on struggle. Markedly graphic, Winters's works tend to rely on dark/light contrasts to carry the day. The large body of related drawings—so weighty in their tamped-down concentration—brings Richard Serra's paint-stick drawings to mind far more than it does the felicitous grayed graphics of Jasper Johns, with whose work, in other respects, Winters's is naturally affiliated.

Winters's elementary designations of color—the Lissajous shapes often appear black when not blue; the Turk's heads are often in red or red-orange—addle when he adds yellow to the palette, leading to murky passages of grayish green and the like. That said, my preferred *Knotted Graph* is his first one, which happens to have yellows going green and gray but also, just right of center, a passage of stinging tenderness. And this tenderness once registered finds many equivalent passages throughout the impressive range of the series.

—Robert Pincus-Witten

