

GALLERY-GOING



ANITA SHAPOLSKY GALLERY/PETRA VALENTIC/4A

Joseph Fiore, 'Erie' (1955).

Abstract Views of Maine

By JOHN GOODRICH

Maine has been a home to many remarkable artists, from Winslow Homer to Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and Fairfield Porter. All these artists were inspired by its rugged coasts and verdant woodlands, but the state has been a nourishing environment for contemporary abstract painters as well. At Anita Shapolsky Gallery, the paintings of three such artists — Joseph Fiore, William Manning, and the late Lynne Drexler — converse intriguingly with one another across the gallery's intimate spaces.

A native of Virginia, Ms. Drexler (1928–99) studied under Robert Motherwell in New York City, and in the '60s began taking regular trips to Monhegan Island with her husband, John Hultberg. She moved there permanently in the '80s, becoming one of the few residents to brave the island's bitter winters. Several of her works from the '70s combine pert brushwork — striations of blue or red strokes, punctuated by yellow swirling clusters — with sections of applied fabric. These pieces of cloth are in turn dotted with small sections of lace or contrasting textiles, each of them meticulously stitched in place. Punning titles, such as "Fabrication #23," reinforce their cheerful quirkiness. These somewhat decorative works seem to have been motivated as much by the pleasures of craft as by formal

THREE FROM MAINE: Lynne Drexler, Joseph Fiore, William Manning

Anita Shapolsky Gallery

considerations. By contrast, two untitled paintings from the '60s feature multitudes of small, squarish strokes, varying slightly in intensity, that gather in colliding swaths of red, yellow, and leafy green. For me, their swarms of color, at once massive and delicate, have a poignant gravity.

Though spending much of the year in New York City, Mr. Fiore (b. 1925) has summered in Maine for almost five decades. At Shapolsky, the influence of his teachers Josef Albers, Ilya Bolotowsky, and Willem de Kooning shows in the spry color of paintings spanning these 50 years. Mr. Fiore's own touch, more airy and lyrical than any of his teachers', is evident in the early canvas "Erie" (1955), which evocatively paces bits of color — red, ochre, and cobalt and cerulean blues — across a field of variegated grays. In the more expressionistic "October I" (1960), densely scribbled patches of red, grayish-purple, and blue coalesce as a brisk diagonal separating foreground planes from the mid-distance, where a single horizontal note of ochre presses a lumpy dark mass — a clump of trees? — dra-

matically into the depths.

Starting in the '80s, Mr. Fiore turned toward calmer compositions of playful, petroglyph-like shapes. "Upward" (2003) is a delicious example: Here colors are subtly weighted to measure out a series of discreet, whimsical events — a greenish-ochre boomerang set on a red place mat, an angular black hourglass on a khaki plane — on an underlying structure of maroon and brown planes. These objects' practical identities remain obscure, but they brim with pictorial purpose.

A lifelong Maine resident, Mr. Manning (b. 1936) presents in his work a fascinating combination of control and abandon. In an early untitled work (1965), a ragged black shape clambers through irregular gray-greens and reds with calculated rawness, but later works elegantly conjoin the gestural and the geometric. In these, he collages sections of paper with fluid, brushy strokes into compositions of crisp, colorful horizontals and verticals. "Untitled (Nighduc) #9" (2007) unfolds as a series of slight asymmetries, their intervals animated by shifts of scale, most notably where a narrow blue vertical passes tremulously over the turbulent collaged area. Despite the methodical approach, there's a quiet passion to these paintings: an ardor that's constrained but not interrogated as it is in Roy Lichtenstein's Pop depiction of an Abstract Ex-

pressionist brushstroke.

For more than 20 years, Mr. Manning has extended these techniques into three dimensions, applying collaged gestures to neatly layered planes of painted wood. The artist considers these works paintings, and indeed, to a surprising degree they escape a frequent failing of multi-colored sculpture, in which hues tend to have the effect of applied decoration. In the small, wall-mounted "Manana West #19" (2005), the geometric areas of color shift physically as well as optically as the viewer moves, and the artist continuously gauges the tensions, including those of a brilliant band of red that alternately peeps around and hides behind a protruding blue-green rectangle. Occasionally the colored patterns feel redundant; this occurs with the pieces that have the greatest sculptural presence, like "Atlantic Windows Times Series #60" (2000), in which a series of thin blocks, set on edge, muscularly engage the surrounding air.

Nitpickers may note that only a few of the paintings in "Three From Maine" show any detectable influence of the state's unique environment. Gallery-goers, though, are unlikely to begrudge this pretext for gathering together three strong, vivid personalities.

Until May 26th (152 E. 65th St., between Lexington and Third avenues, 212-452-1094).