

CHEIM & READ

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Art in Review; Ron Gorchov

By ROBERTA SMITH
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Vito Schnabel

250 Hudson Street, near Canal Street

South Village

Through June 25

Ron Gorchov's emphatic, homespun abstract paintings have been mostly out of sight for the last 20 years, but this selection of old and recent work, organized by Vito Schnabel, the son of the painter Julian Schnabel, brings them roaring back.

Mr. Gorchov was most visible during the second half of the 1970's, when he, Bill Jensen and others started pushing American abstract painting away from Minimalist austerity toward something more explicitly expressionistic. Their efforts helped set the stage for the painters of the elder Mr. Schnabel's generation.

Mr. Gorchov's signature device was an eccentric, doubly bowed stretcher with the canvas stapled (just barely) to its front. He usually covered this surface, which curved in from top to bottom and out from side to side, with loose vertical strokes in a strong aerated color. He finished the job with an eyelike pair of flat, emphatic shapes in a second color.

Part shield and part mask, the bilaterally symmetrical results suggested someone painting with both hands at once -- with or without paintbrushes. They forced Minimalism's object awareness back toward something more essential, visionary and slightly loony. They suggested all art as a form of self-portraiture and personified the starting-over, anything-goes optimism of 1970's painting in this country.

Dating from 1972 to 2005, the paintings look terrific climbing the walls of this enormous ground-floor space. A couple of enormous works made of multiple stacked canvases indicate environmental ambitions, but mostly seem ready for a potlatch ceremony. Others show how Mr. Gorchov has lately been elaborating on his signature double marks, connecting them with loose loops of line in one instance, expanding them into broad stripes (on flat canvases) in others.

The centerpiece of the show is a hypnotically beautiful painting from 1968 that has almost never been exhibited. Its four flamelike shapes of red and yellow on blue suggest some heretofore unknown synthesis of Color Field and Abstract Expressionism, tinged with Symbolism. It belongs in a museum.

ROBERTA SMITH