



Bob Trotman: Installation view of "After the Fall," 2001; at Franklin Parrasch.

of beige paint relax the tightness of the grid.

A richer rhythm characterizes *Shift in Focus* (40 inches square). Five thin horizontals seem to warp under the pressure of three verticals that are twice as wide. The process of scraping, which here caused one color to be pressed into the adjacent colors, creates effects of dynamism that are checked by the stately classicism of the grid.

A smaller painting, *Grand Obsession* (16 inches square), introduces a different kind of complexity, for the more characteristic allover pattern has been replaced by a bisected surface. The left half has a blocky, upward thrust. Morgan appears to have scraped away much of the top-coat of dark gray to reveal a field of yellow and green with patches of orange. The right half retains much of the uppermost skin; scraped horizontal bands of color alternate with thicker gray ones. The two zones seem latched together by a series of emphatic left-right bands. A final application of large multicolored drops adds lightness to the whole. Morgan brings buoyancy to the traditions of abstract painting he unites so intelligently. —*Michaël Amy*

Michael Mulhern at Salander-O'Reilly

For three decades the New York-based gestural abstractionist Michael Mulhern has been producing compositions with a formalist vigor recalling that of the Abstract Expressionists. Mulhern's recent exhibition, his first with Salander-O'Reilly, was his most extraordinary to date. It consisted of six large monochrome paintings (and two tiny works) dating from 1998 to 2000 and demonstrating a new hyped-up, lyrical quality.

Mulhern begins his large paintings on the floor. He draws arabesques with charcoal and thinned black acrylic, creating labyrinths of interconnected markings often structured by a loose grid. He then overpaints those scratchings and doodles with aluminum pigment mixed with linseed oil, black paint and beeswax, frequently leaving much of the raw canvas untouched or exposed. The resulting silver, black, white and sepia images are multilayered palimpsests whose billowing blobs of form hover, sometimes uncomfortably, within the pictorial arena.

In this exhibition, two series of paintings were on view: the "Sluggos" (titled after the sidekick in the "Nancy" comic strip) and the "Overcoats" (a reference perhaps to the over-painting process itself). The two series are remarkably different, especially considering that all the works are monochrome. The three "Overcoats" are somber, muted and melancholic; the three "Sluggos" are lyrical, airy and euphoric. What accounts for the difference, I think, is the medium: the latter are painted on polymerized paper mounted on canvas (a new medium for Mulhern), and the former are painted directly on canvas.

In the "Sluggo" series, the colors float on the paper like ephemeral doodles, each line distinguishable from the others, whereas similar markings on the canvases are sucked into the raw material and meld into each other. In *Sluggo 19* (2000), the most sensational of the lot, a conglomeration of jet-black swoops and squiggles with silvery washes and overlays soars atop the stark white paper. The work's power stems not only from the sharp contrasts but from the overall asymmetry of the composition. Indeed, Mulhern's paintings

are best when imbalanced; the compressing of his lyrical accumulations into a corner produces a strong visual tension, as if the black clouds are trying to release themselves from the constraints of the pictorial frame.

Mulhern's paintings are about painting, its history and its primary elements (color and line). They are profoundly analytic works that require contemplation and that need to be seen in person. Photographic reproductions can neither capture the visual complexities of the nuances nor convey the artist's sheer love of paint itself. —*Maura Reilly*

Bob Trotman at Franklin Parrasch

Generally, when furniture-makers attempt sculpture, they hang on to vestigial function for security, with an occasional drawer here or a bit of tabletop there. But in the early '90s, when Bob Trotman was making furniture, his work was already compellingly sculptural, with carved human figures as central components, and he employed utility to advance the meaning. *He/She Table* had a man and woman—depicted from the hips up, their backs to each other—supporting the ends of a plank that symbolized their apparently burdensome relationship; *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* was a box in the form of a man's head with a drawer pull embedded in his clenched teeth, so you could pull open the drawer and seemingly find out what was inside him.

In his fourth show with Parrasch, Trotman, who lives and works in North Carolina and is self-taught as an artist, let go of the functional aspects. He grouped five wooden figures as an installation titled "After the Fall." The beautifully carved figures, made vulnerable looking by their three-quarter-life-size scale, wear business or casual attire. The wood is subtly colored with tempera and whitewash—gallery information notes that Trotman was influenced by medieval sculpture, especially that of Tilman Riemen-

schneider—but the tints are not used depictively. The modern dress of the smooth-finished figures is blandly nonspecific.

The meaning of the installation unwinds slowly. A man and a woman, *Isaac* and *Ophelia* (both 1999), lie on their backs with their hands drawn up to their chests. They might be in the deep relaxation of a yoga breathing exercise (a possibility consistent with their bare feet and his shorts, though not her shirtwaist dress), but they also recall medieval tomb sculptures. A woman in a dress and shoes lies on her stomach, pushing herself up with the palms of her hands, turning her head to the right with an expression of puzzlement or concern. She is titled *Mia (MIA)*, 2000. The other two men could be different states of one person. *Swan Dive* (2001), a figure we see hovering on tiptoe on a pedestal, his arms flung wide and his tie fluttering over his shoulder, may moments later land on his back like *Poor Paul* (2000), who lies on the floor with one knee bent and his arms outstretched as if imploring.

The main implication of this group is damage. Ophelia in literature was a suicide, Isaac in the Bible was almost sacrificed. St. Paul fell off his donkey on the road to Damascus, and Mia may be missing in action. The man on the pedestal suggests Wall Street suicides of the Great

Charles Parness: *Stairway to Heaven*, 1996, oil on canvas, 78 by 60 inches; at Fischbach.

