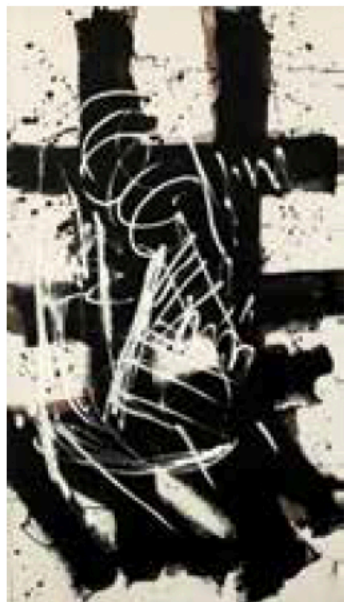


In Black and White

“TO THIS DAY, I would rather look at black and white than anything else,” wrote Michael West in 1981. The painter, born Corinne Michelle West in 1908, was one of the few female members of the New York School and chose to go by “Michael” to avoid the prejudice against women that abounded in the art world. Three decades earlier, in 1951, she wrote, “The future of art lies in color—but am personally more interested in an affect [*sic*] of dark and light—the color explains the space—the more complicated the space the simpler the color.” The desire to paint in monochrome had been longstanding for West—probably born of her interest in Juan Gris and her mentor



Arshile Gorky’s *Nighttime, Enigma, and Nostalgia* series—but she did not begin doing so in earnest until the late ’50s. From April 29–May 31, New York dealer Hollis Taggart is presenting an exhibition



devoted to this aspect of the artist’s work, titled “Epilogue: Michael West’s Monochrome Climax.”

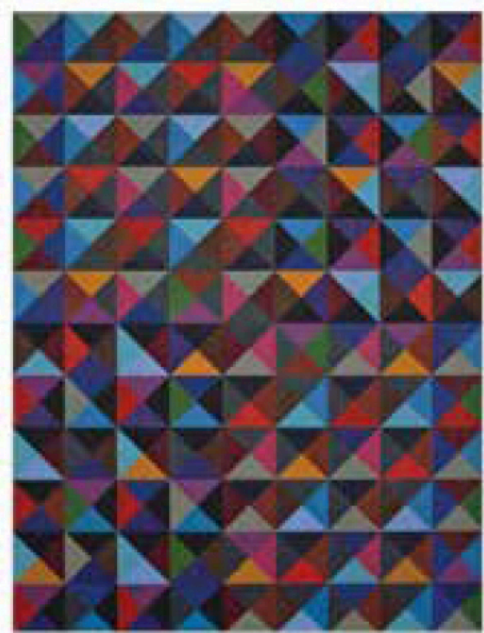
Her black and white (or primarily so) work from the 1960s and ’70s, on view

at Taggart’s gallery, shows West freeing herself from color so as to concentrate on space and depth through texture. To make these works, mainly oil on canvas, she combined brushwork with dripping, pouring, and scratching through the paint layers with a palette knife. In some of the paintings, white lines on a black background create an effect of writing. The exhibition pairs the paintings with excerpts from the artist’s extensive writings, which give insight into the philosophical underpinnings of her work. In one of the most revealing, she wrote, “Black and white is (identical) in my mind—with transfiguration.”



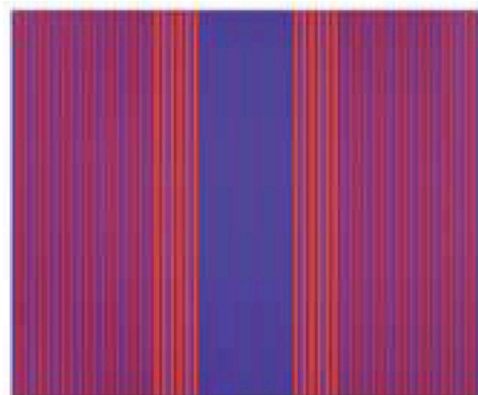
Visual Joy

“KARL BENJAMIN: Selected Paintings 1967–1978” is on view at San Francisco’s Brian Gross Fine Art through May 8. Benjamin, a giant of Southern California postwar painting and a vanguard of hard-edge abstraction, was in a period of radical experimentation throughout the late



1960s and ’70s. During that time, he developed numerous series, each revolving around a new set of parameters but all exploring dynamic relationships between color and form. Benjamin’s dedication to an exacting yet imaginative brand of abstraction was not only ahead of its time but also surprisingly fun.

Works in the show, like #8, an oil on canvas dating to 1967, make this abundantly clear. Here Benjamin created



a gridded system of squares and divided them into equilateral right triangles. The work’s intricate geometry is punctuated by Benjamin’s palette of dazzling, bold colors, which butt against one another, creating the illusion of three-dimensionality. The result is a quilt-like visual experience that feels alive with forms that recede and pop out of the surface of the painting.

An oil on canvas from 1970 titled #10 features one of Benja-

min’s favorite forms: the stripe. In the work, thick bands of hot colors streak vertically down the canvas. They seem to pulse and glimmer as the eye tries to take them all in. In #17 (1977, oil on canvas), Benjamin fills the canvas from edge to edge with fields of pink, orange, and violet, only to stripe it further with thin purple vertical bars. The bars introduce striking color relationships throughout the canvas that are both confounding and dazzling.