

# The New York Art World ® "All You Need To Know."

art reviews

2006

**Stuart Arends**

**Bjorn Ressle Fine Art**

**By Mary Hrbacek**



Minimalist artists explore the forefront of the art field by excluding the illusionistic, representational references found in traditional painting; Stuart Arends is no exception. He scrupulously avoids links to landscape, still life, portraiture or any definable, recognizable subject matter. He intends his relief paintings to be regarded as objects, reduced to a few geometric shapes and surface marks, devoid of any content. This artist constructs works that speak strictly to optical, perceptual issues.

Arends' work differs from that of other minimalist artists, such as Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella, in terms of its small scale; his limited formal choices of surface, color, space and light affect a world of nuance. He elaborates on these formal issues, constructing volumetric objects that establish architectural metaphors correlating to the structure of the room in which the work is displayed. Arends is concerned with how the painted "object" interacts with the architectural space of the gallery, and with orchestrating the space between paintings in order to control the area of a wall by a small-sized artwork. He hones his works down to their basic elements, employing "relief" to detract from the inherent "window" effect of looking into a framed painting. The ambient light of the gallery space becomes as much an art element here as the way that a painter regards reflected light.

At its core, art is personal; the artist lives through the materials. Arends creates a rhythmic patterning within carefully designed compositions. He is interested in the act: the performance aspect of art making, in conceptual terms like Pollock in his Action Paintings. But his use of the small scale fosters an intimacy, a ready connection between the viewer and the art. Color invariably suggests the physical world; black is night, blue is sky, beige can be earth or sand. The blue changes as the light outside the window fades or intensifies. White becomes blue-gray. The color in the pictures varies depending on the angle from which it is viewed. These alterations wed the works to their immediate environment. A painting inevitably transcends the definition of an "object."

In *Wedge #19*, the color-space created by juxtaposed blue and white rectangles sings harmoniously; the blue area draws the viewer in while a gray shape pushes forward visually, recalling the "push-pull" technique of Hans Hoffman. In *Wedge #4* (oil on aluminum), muted gray-black, tan and white define three segments that are each subdivided to produce dark and light reflections.

Arends carefully controls his artistic elements, but the atmospheric effects subject the works to constant change that results in unanticipated surprises. By grafting the pure painting aesthetic of Piet Mondrian onto the shallow depth of a wall relief, Arends devises a minimalist format of many facets. These works, with their slightly angled, luminous rectangles recall Brice Marden's sensual visual effect. There is an understated, pristine subtlety here that fascinates.

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