

Modern Painters
March 2006

Los Angeles

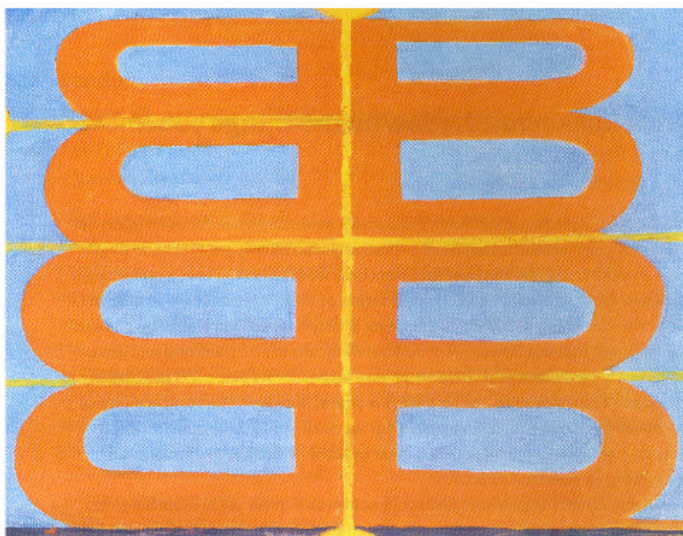
Chris Martin

Daniel Weinberg Gallery

7 JANUARY - 4 FEBRUARY

Chris Martin burst back on the scene last September with a bumptious show at a Brooklyn gallery brilliantly named Sideshow. Alas, I missed it, but lucky for me, Los Angeles is now securely on the map for the hardcore Brooklyn abstract painters, most of whom, when I was living in New York 15 years ago, never made it west of the Hudson River. Martin's work made an impression on me in 1990, largely because of its gregarious manner. I now recognize that his approach to abstraction all along had more than enough to resist the corrosion of the endgame strategies still being propped up in the early 90s. What it had then it has big time today: an unapologetically personal, spiritual and witty take on the anonymity of geometry of the kind also found in the beloved work of Mary Heilmann, or in the ready-to-be-rediscovered paintings of Marilyn Lerner; as well as a probing relationship to such greats as Alfred Jensen, Philip Guston, and even Picasso.

From all accounts, Martin's Sideshow exhibition was unruly: prone to making supersized paintings, he hung some of them outside or in the windows of facing buildings. A twenty-footer did make it into the gallery, along with a back room crowded with art by his friends, postcards and a seemingly infinite range of inspirational keepsakes. So, given Weinberg's small upscale space, could Martin's decision to show eight small-to-midsize paintings possibly be enough? Of course it was, particularly because of the wide range of work he managed to squeeze in, as well as the small, easily missed ninth painting that he hung out by the street at the top of a palm tree. The painting does



have pennies glued on it, so they might catch the sunlight and our attention.

Back in the first room, a small painting with a big title, *High Noon at Dashashamedh Ghat Varanasi* (2004), could be used as a primer for the entire exhibition. In it, a sequence of orange rounded shapes are stacked on top of each other and surrounded by a baby blue ground (sky?) that seems to be resting on a thin strip of purple. The remaining feature, a simple yellow network of straight yet quivering lines, provides a kind of scaffolding to the entire production, supporting a wide range of possible associations provoked by the title: from Gary Cooper to the river Ganges. In the second room, my favourite painting, *End of the Movie...* (1983-2005), and my least favourite, *Dedicated to Blinky Palermo* (1973-2005), share the kind of wide time span of production that could come across as affected. The former escapes that trap with its goofy clarity (a black-and-white canvas whose sunken appearance is caused, it would seem, by the visual POW! of its semaphore explosion), while the latter is mortally wounded by a clumsy dedication written on its surface. But with all of this joyous energy, I'll even take that.

TRM

Chris Martin *High Noon at Dashashamedh Ghat Varanasi*, 2004, oil on canvas, 28 x 36 cm
COURTESY DANIEL WEINBERG GALLERY, LOS ANGELES