

ALEXANDRE

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ART IN REVIEW

ART IN REVIEW; Pat Adams -- 'Paintings: 1954 - 2004'

By Ken Johnson

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Zabriskie 41 East 57th Street Manhattan Through March 5

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of her first show at Zabriskie -- which was also the gallery's fourth show ever -- Pat Adams's current exhibition takes an abbreviated look back over her long and distinguished career. This fine retrospective of small works reveals a painter who has stayed true to certain idiosyncratic visual and spiritual predilections without straying far from the main highway of Modernist abstraction.

Ms. Adams's earliest work here, "Ribbon of Breath" (1954), is a luminous composition of clustered, semi-transparent bulbous forms, painted in watercolor in rainbow colors with the fastidious touch of a Medieval manuscript painter. It shows the inspiration of Klee, Kandinsky and Miró and the playful cosmic vision that would continue to animate her painting.

From the late 1960's on, Ms. Adams's paintings typically feature expansive, richly colored and textured fields punctuated by sharply defined abstract elements, often in high-key hues: stripes, arabesques, spirals, circles, triangles and other geometric figures. Her pictures suggest Platonic archetypes cavorting through the psychic space of a universal collective consciousness.

In later work there is less spacey levity and a more stable, darker physicality. Ms. Adams has often added sand, mica and other granular materials to her paint to enhance its material qualities.

Still, there is the ethereal, philosophical dimension, as in "These Become This" (1999), in which two large black circles seem to emerge from -- or collapse into -- an amorphous, tarry mass in the middle. It is like a Tantric emblem of being and nothingness. KEN JOHNSON

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