

MARTHA KELLER

The wedge shape that Martha Keller floats in her paintings looks like a pie slice from a circle graph. It actually has as its source the silhouette of a baseball field. The surfaces of her paintings are fairly heavy-bodied but with a smooth, still hand-wrought finish, not unlike Brice Marden's early gray paintings and the subsequent "Grove Group." In fact, Keller shares many of Marden's post-Minimal concerns: residue of the hand; slightly "off," nature-related, mixed-down coloration; and the search for a tense but poised sense of interior scale.

Keller's baseball field is a purely Suprematist shape, that is, except for its referentiality. Hence, a crazy dialogue with the abstract tradition is set up. Though not referred to explicitly in his paintings, stories of Newman's baseball

fanaticism add a warm patina to his occasionally daunting cerebrality. The late Ted Stamm titled a series of sleek, rigorous, low-slung black and white paintings "Dodger." I think Keller's referentiality should be regarded accordingly, a whiff of home cooking in the kitchen of International Style. Besides, the shape has other references, to oriental hand-held fans and the sweep of the ruler in Johns' *Devise* painting.

The shape proves spatially flexible. The best painting in the show, *La Gonfiatura d'el Ombra Piatta* (rough translation, "The flat shadow inflated by light") crops either end of the diamond off at the sides of the canvas. The shape appears to flatten out like a violet landing platform in an orange/mauve spatial field, not unlike the trapezoidal "stage" in Robin Rose's abstract paintings. This

spatial dynamism is furthered by Keller's facility with color. The suspended light in this painting is breathtaking, more a light swollen with shade than the reverse. A humid Venetian light however you read it, the effect may have something to do with the matte translucency of her oil and wax medium. The bleeding streaks in the violet reveal the warm oranges and yellows heating up the painting from underneath.

This burying of color is also evident in the earth red below the yellow/green field of *Quercitron Park*. The lighter color explodes off the darker color, creating a near electric light. Light, whether nocturnal in *Night Game* or the sanctified white light of *Riverfront Diamond*, infuses all of Keller's paintings in this rewarding show. (Stephen Rosenberg, *February 4-March 8*)