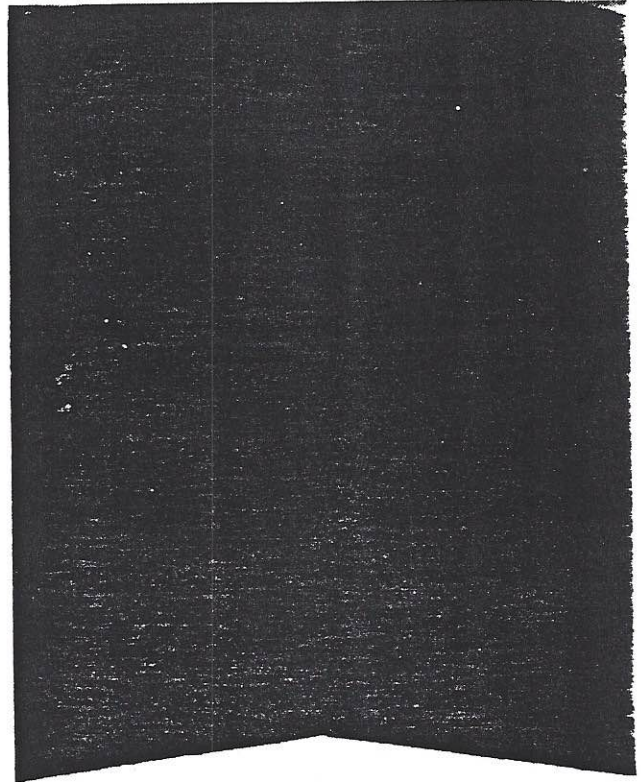# ARTnews

MARTHA KELLER

Stephen Rosenberg

These are deceptively simple paintings. Compositions are basic—a wedge of color set on a dark ground; a pair of interlocked triangles, bottom and top edges slightly curved in homage to the pie-wedge shape of the baseball field; a set of three squares set atop one another. But if the format suggests Minimalism, the strange light and space have mystical overtones.

Mixing oil, wax, and, occasionally, graphite, Keller creates surfaces that are optically dense without being physically so. Traces of bright underlayers flicker through the dark fields, while wedges of color shimmer with subdued highlights. Those areas mixed with graphite are particularly sensitive to shifting light. In *Blind Dream*, a rectangular black shape of graphite and wax sits on a matte black field. In certain lights, the interior shape exudes a dull, silvery gleam; with other illumination, it becomes a deep bottomless black that seems to absorb light as if into a black hole. Meanwhile, its relation to the surrounding ground also changes, as it becomes lighter or darker than the black that frames it.

Blind Dream brings to mind Ad Reinhardt's black paintings. The fields of layered, internally illuminated color in other works recall Rothko or Newman. *Passionate Sepulchre* is composed of three rectangular panels stacked one atop another. The middle panel features a veil of black encaustic scumbled over a red underlayer. The side panels are painted a rich red,

Martha Keller, *Concealed Green*, oil, wax, and graphite on canvas, 84 by 60 inches. Stephen Rosenberg.

muted in some sections by strokes of black. The line dividing the black middle panel from the lower one is a streak of brilliant red so pure it almost reads like a line of flame.

Abstract art that speaks convincingly of the ascendance of spirit over matter is rare. The immaterial light that seeps through these brooding paintings offers eloquent evidence that a spiritually oriented abstraction is still possible. **—Eleanor Heartney**