

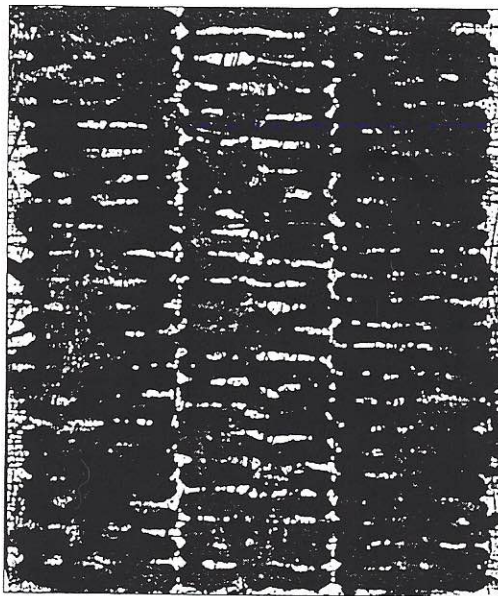
“Basic Marks”

ROSENBERG + KAUFMAN

This grouping of black-and-white paintings was the ideal showcase for eight abstract artists at different stages in their careers. Black and white—the ultimate contrast—constitute a natural drama, a tension between poles that simultaneously negate and define each other. The curator, Michael Mulhern, who contributed two excellent pieces of his own in a muted action-painting style, created harmony out of dissonance. The overall effect was balletic in its rhythms.

The works included, by four women and four men, were of a uniformly high quality. Notable were paintings by Martha Keller, who creates depth by alternating black vertical sequences only to eliminate it by “distressing” her surfaces, and Seymour Boardman, whose witty paintings were mirror twins: either a white field intersected by a black jagged pattern or just the opposite.

Of particular interest were two paintings by Joan Witek and a work on plywood by Jan Frank. Witek, who has gone from predominantly white work in the 1980s to predominantly black work in the '90s, creates enormous melodrama while paring down the means at her disposal to a bare minimum. The alternating ribs of black and white and the reworked surfaces suggest strife simply through their cadences.



Joan Witek, *Untitled*, 1984,
acrylic on canvas, 62" x 51".
Rosenberg + Kaufman.

Frank's single painting, *Nake the Snake*, was on an uncharacteristically intimate scale (34 by 24 inches). This work on plywood—its splotches of yellow an exception to the show's black-and-white rule—was a study in controlled cacophony. The patterns in the plywood (the grain and the knot marks) play off against Frank's black calligraphic markings—deliberately incomprehensible writing—to produce a discordant rhythm: chaos created and controlled.

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