

# Review

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**MARTHA KELLER**  
**DESISTANCE**  
ROSENBERG + KAUFMAN FINE ART

As in her last exhibition, Martha Keller continues to explore vertical linearity. Lines run from the top of the canvas to the bottom, and, while variable, they are also perfectly vertical. They appear to be pulled downward by gravity, following a trail that is satisfyingly straight and true, like connective tissue between earth and sky. They stretch and sigh within some expansive realm between polarities. They merge the order and rhythms of Agnes Martin with the expressive qualities of Franz Kline - while neither hard edge or gestural, they are both.

An important aspect of this work is its deliberate nature. Although visually it has little in common with Donald Judd's sculpture, there is an attitude, a stubbornness in common that is expressed by the name of the exhibition *Desistance*. Keller's lines have a goal and they reach it. On the other hand, the trip down the canvas is an adventure, full of small accidents and surprises, with some lines beginning as one color and staying that way, while others metamorphose into a different color partway down. Some lines run into smudges and smears, creating the "ongoing stopping" that Ms. Keller describes.

The paint is thin but dense, and the paintings seem to breathe. Light is a horizontal force weaving in and out, playing the role of warp to the woof of colored lines, countering and connecting them in an overall pattern of dynamic vitality. Using accidents both controlled and unplanned, Keller has energized the surfaces of these works more than in any of her recent paintings. Close up the eye is caught by textures and subtleties of movement and color, farther away, the paintings become jewels.

The colors from one painting to the next range from brilliant primaries to monotonal grays. *RUDD YELLAN GRUEBLEEN ORANGEMAN*, 1998 is a mix of brilliant tones with a run of black in the center right; *OUTWASHED ENGRAVURE*, 1998, is nearly monotonal, moving from grays to earthy browns. The paintings change from one to the next like the days change - sun to rain, season to season.

I have followed Martha Keller's work and its continuing evolution for a number of years. She is dedicated to the forms and tenets of abstract painting, and she talks about her work in cogent theoretical and personal terms. But unlike some art that may speak volumes but isn't much to look at, her paintings are both philosophically complex and visually rewarding.

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