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December 2008 Art News review: Cleve Gray

Kent, Connecticut

This exhibition of 38 rarely shown canvases and half dozen sculptures from three decades of Cleve Gray's career afforded the welcome opportunity to study the artist's post-color-field ventures. Unlike those earlier efforts, with their amorphous textures and diluted backdrops, the midsize paintings in this show were marked by vigorous, clearly delineated brushstrokes and bold, often circular shapes that dominated the picture.

In *Perne #11* (1978) a tightly wrapped ovular pattern with a "W" shape at its center hovers on a burnt orange background. Because of the contrast between the monochromatic background and the violent activity of the foreground image, the forms seem three-dimensional.

A similar effect was evident in *The Eagle Dying* (1978) and *Falconer* (1979), in which obsidian-dark, wavy patterns are condensed into ominous bird shapes. The falcon is made more potently ferocious by flashes of cobalt blue and yellow.

Hawaii #! (1970), with a downward flow of soft purples and fleeting orange atop a uniformly aquamarine background, offers a comparatively calm allusion to the easy rippling of a stream over a small waterfall.

In *Cortez* (1959), one of the earliest paintings in the show, what at first appears to be a blank ground of primed canvas turns out to be white overpainting. It encroaches on the richly layered blocks of deep blue and lively green like a hard-edged fog bank moving in from the left. A small orange band, just off center, comes in and out of focus like a distant horizon seen through changing atmospheric conditions.

-Colin Fleming

