

MORRISON GALLERY

CLEVE GRAY: WORKS ON PAPER – Review, *ART NEW ENGLAND*

An exhibit of some forty works on paper by artist Cleve Gray, who died in 2004, offers a surprisingly vivid peek into two very different movements in this highly respected artist's more private musings on art making. Poetic and experimental, this intuitive and cerebral master of the abstract--who has clear affinities to contemporaries like Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Helen Frankenthaler--is here revealed on a smaller scale, in two separate bodies of works on paper.

The *Interplay* series, created during the last four years of his life, is from a spring exhibit at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, New York; the other series, recently discovered in a drawer of this studio, dates from 1979.

The contrast between the two is subtle and dramatic. The artist in *Interplay* works like a child crouched over a puddle, stirring shallow pools of color that mingle and flood. *Interplay E*, for example, is all search and play; a dollop of red-orange bursts like a pinwheel in the wet, blue field. Sketch-like marks scuffed into the paper etch a dreamlike channeling of Paul Klee.

The 1979 works are grittier and more intense. These mixed-media drawings are more heavily worked, shimmering encounters of wet and dry pigment, as rich as old chalkboard or a palimpsest. It's hard to do justice to the lavishness of these surfaces, which are worked more like leather than paper. Here, one senses a more brisk, haiku-like strategy. Pigment takes on a living quality: metallic fields are smoky and glowing, coppered or fiery, brushed with slurries of chalky white or slashed with calligraphic strokes of inky black.

There's an unmistakable quality of music in Cleve Grays' work--a dancing, lyric celebration of movement and of color, which he handles with utmost sensuality, almost like sound. In contrast to the monumental paintings for which he is best known, the pleasure in the works on paper comes from the echoing music, which invites intimacy rather than pompousness, and draws on the self-revealing energies of a life-long song.

- Patricia Rosoff
ART NEW ENGLAND, October/November 2009

