

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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Michael Goldberg

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Art in America

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Michael Goldberg at Lennon, Weinberg

Michael Goldberg's nine sinewy abstract paintings and accompanying works on paper on view at Lennon, Weinberg demonstrated persuasively that painting has legs. This exhibition was one of three concurrent gallery shows (the others were at Manny Silverman in Los Angeles and Thomas McCormick in Chicago) presenting pieces done in the last two years.

Goldberg, an artist in his late 70s, began his career in the early 1950s at a time when painting claimed to speak for itself. In this, his 99th solo exhibition, he continues to wield his materials with the nerve and self-possession of a painter who believes that mute constituents can be voiced—and that someone is still listening.

The works, adroit deployments of ropy oil stick and troweled oil paint on canvas, ranged from a thumping 114 inches square to a human-scale 56 by 52 inches. Goldberg's prismatic oil-stick scrawls are applied in intricate gathers, loose skeins and impenetrable tangles. Tussocks of stick and trowel strokes vary in opacity, width, weight, velocity and direc-

tional deliberateness. In several works, warm black or brown oils are skimmed atop a linear scrum with wide knives in blunt cross-hatched shapes suggesting blocky letters, which offsets the galloping indeterminacy of the oil-stick contours.

The paintings' edges are, previous to execution, taped-off or inset with charcoal line, creating a formal hedge of white canvas, outside of which all notation ceases. Inside of the civilizing achromatic boundary, paint boils, heaves, convulses, slackens and congeals into myriad gestural turns. Goldberg manages to orchestrate the tumult in such a way as to sidestep the bathetic pitfalls and emotive excesses of latter-day expressionism; he spins off measured compositional algorithms and improvises inside those equations with judiciously selected borrowings from the lexicon of nonobjective painting.

Dovedale by Moonlight is one of Goldberg's more lyrical efforts. The work recalls the overall ("puzzle piece") compositional strategy that occupied Jean Dubuffet in the 1970s, infused with the sort of erotic rhythm and biomorphism associated with Arshile Gorky or John Altoon. Snarled hanks of colored line nest devotedly against one

another and suspend euphoriously from a planar filigree of black over white. *Old Man and Death* is by comparison an unflinching meditation on incipient darkness. The tracery, which in *Dovedale* cradled chromatic life, transforms in *Old Man* to dark clotted webs that overwhelm and bury the colored forms.

Open Hearth with a Fire presents an edge-to-edge tangle of glowing coiled lines seen through a translucent thatch of dark gray and burnt umber. The pitchy pigment's obscuring weight seems to bank rather than smother the glimmering coruscations.

Michael Goldberg is not one to hang fire. This exhibition was no exception. In the chilly conceptual climate of the early 21st century, it is life-sustaining to stand in front of paintings that warm one's senses.

—Roger Boyce

Michael Goldberg: *Dovedale by Moonlight*, 2001, oil on canvas, 86½ by 81½ inches; at Lennon, Weinberg.

