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Art in America

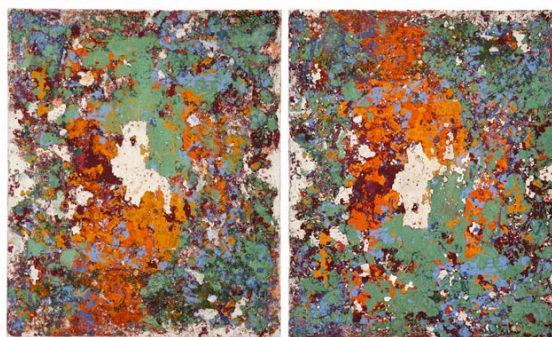
INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Rainer Gross at Axel Raben Gallery

By Michael Amy
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You can brush, trowel, press, throw, squirt, drip or pour paint onto a canvas, or stain it with diluted medium. It has all been done.

Rainer Gross makes paint adhere to the support in yet another way in order to arriving at compelling abstract compositions. Since the early 90s this New York-based artist from Cologne has experimented with the monotype techniques, here adapting them to create the body of paintings ("*Contact Paintings*"), that he displayed -together with six monotypes on paper- at Axel Raben (all 2004).



Roos Twins, 2006, 24 x 20" each, (in two parts)
oil and pigments on linen

Gross' first covers his linen support, placed horizontally, with three layers of dry (usually) white pigment mixed with water, and then continues to apply successive monochrome or polychrome layers of dry pigments mixed with water, allowing each layer sufficient time to dry. Next, he takes another canvas of the same size and format, covers it with a thick coat of (usually) white oil paint, and places this canvas face down on top of its counterpart. He presses down on it so that the oil medium can seep through, and eventually he pulls the canvases apart.

The result is that the surface patterns (though not always the colors) on the canvases roughly mirror each other. Gross obtains chipped plastery-looking surfaces with a dense craquelure. He displays the paired canvases side by side or one above the other, though he may add a twist by turning one of the panels 180 degrees. The paintings are sold as pairs and are to be displayed as was determined by the artist. Gross, who is interested in Fluxus, finds titles for his pictures by randomly selecting names from the phonebook.

These organic abstractions with their saturated patches of color -this desiccated simulacrum of painterliness, in which process and chance play such a crucial role- evoke repeatedly repainted and weathered walls, as well as views of the earth's topography as perceived from a great distance. With their layering and revealing, they remind us of the déchéirages of Hains and de la Villeglé and of the remnants of painted walls in the rubber castings of Overby.

Omar Twins, with one vertical panel turned 180 degrees, consists of beiges, whites, deep blues and residues of olive green. Its palette and drifting plates evoke early Joan Mitchell and, more elliptically, the all-over fields of late Monet. The larger *Deura Twins*, with its five fading vertical orange-red and blue bars per vertical panel, interspersed with beige and a yellow-green haze, reminds one of shredded flags. Gross' ephemeral looking work alluding to the destructive forces of time, tackles the modernist tradition with zest.