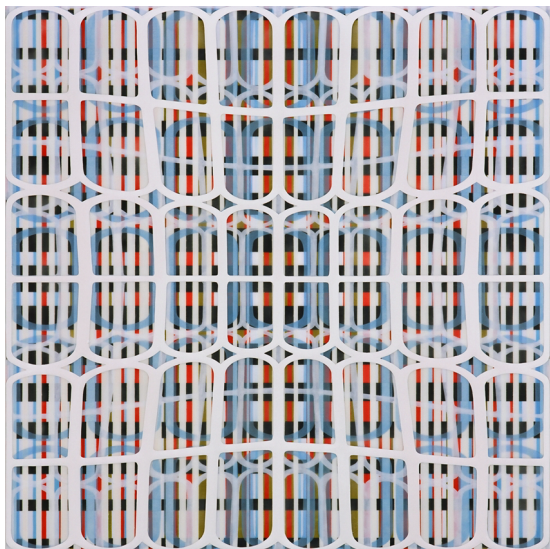


NeoMod: Recent Northern California Abstraction
Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA
November 20, 2004-January 20, 2005

Catalogue essay (excerpt) by
Diana Daniels, Associate Curator of Art



FAR LEFT: Amy Ellingson,
Identical/Variation (blue, red,
yellow, white) No. 3, 2003.
Encaustic and oil on panel,
30 x 30 inches.
Courtesy of the Artist
and Haines Gallery.

IN THE PAST DECADE, artists in Northern California have been producing work with a cool, urban aesthetic often possessing a design-oriented edge. *Neo Mod: Recent Northern California Abstraction* surveys current work by thirty-three artists representing the exciting breadth of new abstraction presently illuminating the regional art scene. Works respond to influences omnipresent in the cultural and social milieu of Northern California—computer technology, consumer consumption, and nature’s abundance—referenced through multiple mediums.

Much of the new work explored in *Neo Mod* is large and brash in its high-keyed, retinal style. Complex organization, sensuous surfaces, richly applied materials, and dynamic colors in these works present updated takes on centuries-old techniques and in several instances synthesize the newest in computer-generated design with venerated traditional practices. A spirit of innovation and appropriation pervades the cumulative results as does a profound appreciation for mid-century design’s functional forms and pattern.

The “mod” product often evoked in this new abstraction has definitely been in the air for Oakland-based artist Aaron Petersen. “It’s more than Ikea. Ikea just happened to profitably tap into the spirit.” San Francisco artist Rex Ray, who collects vintage examples of furniture and decorative items from the 1950s and 1960s, agrees. Inspiration for the biomorphic, fanciful shapes in his collages often results from this passion for color and decorative form. “I love beautiful things and creating beautiful things. These forms are my idea of beauty.”

But for Ray and Amy Ellingson, this mod bent is not about recycling past fashion. The rapid increase in the power and ease of computer-based design tools have opened up abstraction to new inquiries. While many artists have embraced digital as the sole basis for their art—creating web-only projects or IRIS prints—Ellingson and Ray are among the many combining the new with the old, altering and transforming computer-generated imagery into forms and patterns that are painted or collaged entirely by hand. Ellingson painstakingly works in encaustic to build layer upon layer of pulsating line work, resulting in exhilarating optical plays upon vision and perception, testing our capacity to absorb visual information.

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