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Bob Duran's new paintings at Bykert show an extraordinary power in the deployment of their color-shapes—extraordinary because it is not in the least logical, and yet it finds a coherence with the authority of logic. This not to say that he simulates logical development by drawing on preformed expectations, as one implies in saying that an artist achieves a certain “rightness” time after time. On the contrary, each state of Duran's paintings has seemed self-sufficient, complete; an impression which can be convincing only when an artist ignores preformed expectations and the stylistic momentum they create.

Each new set of Duran's paintings has a diagram-like clarity; it charts the possible for a new relationship of brush stroke to color and of color-shape to the shape of the canvas. In this latest set the shapes are larger they have ever been: he risks losing the clarity of his previous reference to maps and mapping processes. He gains by giving his new, larger shapes a new impact: many of them compete rather directly for the attention one gives to an entire painting. And yet, no matter how he varies his palette, the size of his color-shapes or the style of their connections to each other and the canvas, he cannot, even within a unified set of paintings, present or even indicate every variation. The value of his art is that what he does present is rich and allusive enough to make the appearance of total explicitness unnecessary. Such an appearance can only in painting that limits itself to previously defined issues—rather, to the attempt to “solve” such issues. Duran's painting is not directed at all toward the standard issues, for they are supra-personal and he is concerned with the personal, that is, the experienced.

His indifference to the modernist drive toward the explicit, the definable, leads to a paradox of sorts: it is gratifyingly complex work such as his that needn't try to run itself out to the end of its premises in order to take on meaning, while the practitioners of the explicit--painters and others who begin with previously defined issues-- require of themselves precisely that, for once the machine of the “art idea” has been set in motion it must always be run out to the end if the practitioner is to allow his work to be credited with an achieved meaning. One would suppose the opposite to be the case, that the artist who admits the indefinable into his work would be the restless, compulsive one, while the artist who limits himself from the outset to what he can define would be satisfied with the definitions themselves. The paradox can be resolved by noting that Duran, for our present example, engages one sort of meaning and the artist of the explicit engages another. Duran can rest after a set of paintings because its meaning, while not totally explicit, has the satisfactory--in

deed, profoundly gratifying--quality of reflecting on the fundamentally ambiguous ("non-explicit") nature of all *fully experienced* meaning. By contrast, the artist of the explicit detaches meaning from all experience except the cognitive, which is a very unsatisfactory thing to do, and so the artwork that bears this meaning reduces itself to compulsive repetitiveness, a constant stating and restating of limited possibilities, a substitution of overly-defined "art activity" for the achievement of experienced meaning. (I am comparing Duran to those painters who have defined their development according to historical issues in a conceptualized form, and to artists who have gone beyond painting to concept itself, to conceptual art.)

What Duran understands— *from the viewpoint of his intention to paint*—is that meaning is always provisional; that is, it is a reflexive coming to terms with the "non-explicit" in experience; and that painting is valuable, meaningful, when it invites this reflexiveness on the part of the viewer. In these latest works the relationships of size to color, shape to color, surface to illusionary depth, depth to color and so on are so ambiguous that no discrete, definable entities appear. No pattern of variations can be established, hence no end point can be reached. When it comes to be understood that such end points—the illusionary, I mean, deluded goals of the practitioners of the explicit--are no more than transcendently garnished "achievements" of entropy, then perhaps it will be understood that such painters as Duran hold entropy at bay precisely by achieving a refusal of end points, by suspending their images in the ambiguous contexts which give them their (ambiguous, richly engaging) meanings.

I'm approaching Duran's works in these terms because they hover in the vicinity of this intention: his flat shapes, in effect, extended brush strokes, seem to begin to connect as if they were pieces of a puzzle to be fitted together, "solved", reduced to complete explicitness. One wonders if the arrangement of shapes in one of these new paintings is the first step in a limited series of permutations. In other words, Duran flirts with entropy. He brings up the possibility of an end point (consciously or not), rejecting it (implicitly) with pictorially ambiguous "proof" that it is not a real possibility for him.