Frederick Hammersley

Artists Space
223 West Broadway (at White Street)
Through tomorrow

While Artists Space usually concentrates on the young and the unaffiliated, each year it devotes an exhibition, sponsored by the Mark Rothko Foundation, to older artists whom it deems worthy of broader recognition. This year's Rothko Foundation show presents the recent work of two long-time abstract painters, Calvert Coggeshall (born 1907), who exhibited regularly with Betty Parsons but has not shown since 1980, and Frederick Hammersley (born 1919), who is best known on the West Coast.

Hammersley, the stronger of the two painters, pursues a hard-edged abstraction that is alternately geometric and biomorphic. His work has close similarities with that of John McLaughlin, another West Coast abstractionist, but his sturdily painted surfaces and bracing contrasts of white and color are much more aggressive. Best are those large geometric works based on an "H" configuration, whose carefully scaled bands and blocks of color are symmetrical and perpendicular to each other—a look that is very fashionable these days. These paintings have crisp, gridded tone, as if Mr. Hammersley were reconsidering late Mondrian by way of Ellsworth Kelly.

In the small, biomorphic paintings on board, Mr. Hammersley eliminates white and avoids primaries, to concentrate on much less predictable colors and shapes. The results, too, are equally crisp and sometimes too completely resolved. They suggest ironed-out Arthur Dove, but they also improve, the longer and the closer you look at them.

Mr. Coggeshall's dark canvases, most of which date from the last three years, are often indebted to Rothko and Barnett Newman, but they are beautifully executed nonetheless. They consist of deep blue or brown monochromes, broken by subtle striations, slung in taut and crispy lines. Especially in their favor is a mysteriously smooth and glowing matte surface that suggests a kind of liquid pastel. One of the strongest works on view is the white, thin thing in it, Mr. Coggeshall. It is a lily, further away from his influences and does them the greatest justice.

Art Blakey

Art Blakey, a drummer, will lead the Jazz Messengers tonight through Sunday at Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Avenue South, above Bleecker Street (224-1785). Sets are at 10 and 11:45 P.M. and 1:30 A.M.; there is a $12 cover and a $5 minimum.

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