



**Top right** Robert Swain: *Untitled No. 901*, 1975, 9 feet square; at Susan Caldwell. **Top far right** Ralph Humphrey: *Untitled, No. 4*, 1975, acrylic on canvas, 60 by 46 by 6¼ inches; at John Weber. **Right** Susan Leites: *Red Tulip*, 1975, oil on paper, 14 by 10 inches; at Artists Space. **Far right** Harmony Hammond: *Kybro's Born*, 1975, oil and wax on canvas, 24 by 33 inches; at Lamagna.

mentaries further complicate this illusion of value change by adding an illusion of change in hue. Swain also plays with the illusion of transparency, so that any square or group of squares can appear to be transparent and to overlap or underlie any others. Thus, in addition to their initial flat reading, these paintings can also be read as if they open into layer upon layer of chromatic depth like a hall of mirrors.

Pure color sensations ring seemingly infinite changes in pattern. At one instant one might see an arrangement of stacked squares, then a chain of diamonds, then interlocking zig zags and finally a rectilinear spiral. The viewer is always chasing illusions—you can't see two illusions at once. It is our own perceptual participation that gives the works their mystery. And if we allow our eye and mind to be absorbed into the structure and effects of color, our feelings, too, will be caught in the magic of light. —Hayden Herrera

**Susan Leites at Artists Space**

Susan Leites' paintings are realistic in an allover mode. Her subject is always flowers, though her medium varies—oil on canvas, oil on paper, watercolor on paper, paper cutouts. In *Dahlias*, an oil painting,

the flowers crowd in high-keyed profusion up to the surface and the edges of the canvas. Each blossom covers so much area its complete form tends at first to be elusive. The eye is presented with a spectacle of sheer floweriness in which the spread of petals and the reach of leaves and stems show an energy not to be contained by the decorum of any arrangement. No hint of a vase ever appears, though Leites' version of allover painting remakes the particularly decorous realism of such 19th-century American flower painters as Severin Roesen and his 17th-century Dutch models, De Heem, Heda and so many others.

These earlier flower painters are recalled especially by the crisp, satiny textures Leites builds up from layers of thinned oil paint. She keeps her work in the present with her high-keyed palette and the size of her canvases. *Dahlias* measures a bit over 6 feet high and a bit under 6 feet wide. *Fuchsias* and *Pink Poinsettias* are slightly smaller. For allover paintings, these are medium-sized; for flower paintings, they're immense. Roesen and his stylistic ancestors used oil paint to impart a glistening, occasionally metallic clarity to the form and color of blossoms held to life size or smaller. Suddenly

brought into intense close-up, Leites' flowers give her the chance to treat their quiet jostling at the scale of landscape, while oil paint itself becomes less the medium of an idealized botany than a means to expand the genre's bright and shiny surfaces till they evoke vast passages of light—at the scale of landscape, once more. Yet the identity of particular flowers—individual members of recognizable species—is never lost. Nor does an appropriate scale slip away. One never has the sense of looking at unnaturally large objects floating in chasms. Suggestions of landscapes are paradoxically compatible with images of very small inhabitants of landscape—flowers—thanks to the way Leites has freed the actual size of her painted forms from the size of their referents.

Among the smaller works in the show, the paper cutouts have a special interest because their overlapping elements are miniatures of the large oil paintings' main imagery. Allover painting is traditionally abstract. Leites arrived at realism in an allover mode by working in part from these flower silhouettes, which themselves join abstraction and representation. Her crucial decision was to bring her im-