

Painter Exhibits 'Pattern and Prayers'

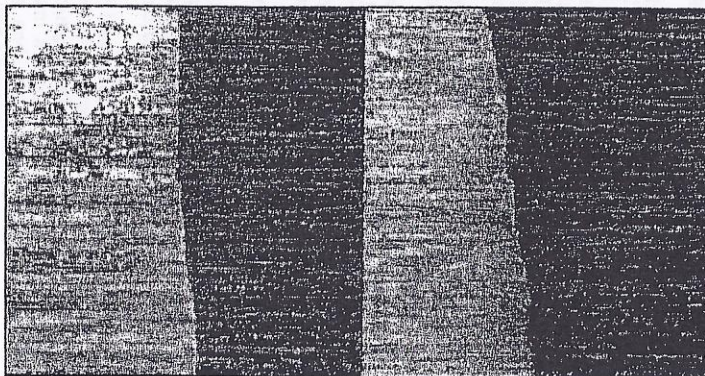
By Arthur Whitman

More so than many abstractionists, Pittsburg-based painter Michael Morrill is an artist's artist. Although the tactile richness of his work might invite broad appeal, his ideal audience might be that of other painters.

His color, sometimes harsh and discordant, sometimes subtle but unobvious, is one factor. So, too, is the obscurity of his technique. One can spend a lot of time in front of his paintings trying to figure out how they were made. Finally, these are images loaded with allusions to other abstract painters: Jasper Johns, Robert Ryman, Sean Scully and Gerhard Richter among them.

"Pattern and Prayers," a show of Morrill's work, is currently up at the String Room Gallery at Wells College in Aurora. It incorporates work from two recent series, "Linea Terminale" and "ISIS."

"Linea Terminale," Italian for a line of ending or division, refers to Galileo and his telescopic lunar drawings. It was thought to divide the dark and light parts of the moon. In Morrill's series, each piece is made up of two panels



"Linea Terminale 3.10" by Michael Morrill.

hung together, touching. As with nearly all of Morrill's work here, repetition is basic; here it is reduced to an anthropomorphic left versus right.

Both panels are variations on the same basic structure: a lighter color on the left, a darker one on the right. Narrow horizontal bands, subtle but distinct, tie everything together. (Tracing these bands, the line is slightly jagged.) The reference to aerial landscape is vivid, enhanced by the paintings' subtle,

"naturalistic" colors—in many cases the show's most inviting.

"Linea Terminale 3.10" suggests a landscape more earthly than lunar. A pale green fog sits through the left, impenetrable dark blue on the right. Like the majority of the works here, it was done on fabric (here linen, elsewhere canvas) stretched over a solid panel rather than stretcher bars. The resistance of a hard surface seems integral to Morrill's painterly daring. Here, for example, we see short vertical

strokes, long horizontal ones and wet drips and smudges, all brought together with architectural precision.

Sharing a similar structure and textures, "Linea Terminale 6.10" may be the show's most beautifully colored piece: the light side pale reddish-purple and dull copper, the right a darker red-purple.

As well as evoking the Egyptian mother-god and the two-letter copula, the series title "ISIS" echoes the repetitive, grid-based structure that characterizes most of these images. If the "Linea" pieces suggest stereo landscapes, then their finely grained grids evoke the sequence and repetition of writing and music. The indebtedness to the Minimalism of the Sixties is clear, here given a fuller embodiment through their painterly lushness.

"ISIS 17: One Squared" features two tall rectangular canvas panels while ISIS 16 features a single square one. Both make prominent use of iridescent pigments that vary in color appearance depending on lighting and location. A thin tint shifts from warm purple to dirty green. Opaque vertical blocks

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Photo provided