

ART

Sheinkman's abstracts embrace both logic and enigma

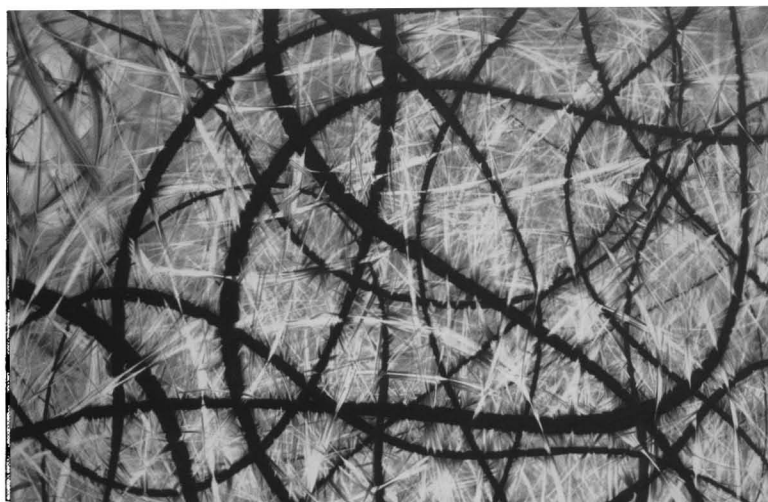
By ALICE THORSON
The Kansas City Star

There's a bench in the middle of the Kemper Museum's Barbara Uhlmann Gallery, where a new exhibit of abstract paintings by New York artist Mark Sheinkman went up last month. If you really want to get a sense of these works, plan to sit down and have a good long look.

With their austere palette of black, white and gray and repeated motif of looping, overlapping lines, these are not glance-and-go artworks. Despite their similarities, each piece has a distinct personality.

In the largest painting, a dark-edged, lassoing whiplash line performs on the surface of a shallow atmospheric field of smudgy, looping, chalk-like lines that look like trails of smoke. The effect is of a time-lapse shot of a spinning rope.

A vertical piece just inside the gallery door displays a webby patterning of thin white lines, rather like what a cat might make out of a ball of yarn if left alone for a few hours. But in Sheinkman's hands, the composition breathes, as dense bundlings of his curving



Christopher Burke Studio

"7.1.2004" by Mark Sheinkman is part of the New York artist's exhibit of new abstract paintings at the Kemper.

lines give way to less congested areas. The effect is sprightly and lyrical.

In contrast, a sense of menace and struggle emanates from a composition dominated by thick black lines frayed or severed by cuts of an eraser to yield a kind of barbed wire effect. In the spaces between them luminous criss-crossing patches of erasure evoke the fracturing of ice crystals on a window.

Other works are enlivened by shadow play and a nod to the illusionistic space of photography.

There are six paintings in all, executed in oil and graphite on canvas, and measuring from 4 by 6 feet to 5 by 8 feet. As reflected in the titles — each a series of numbers denoting a particular date — all were created from May through October 2004.

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SHEINKMAN: Paintings invite a long look

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These new works build on more than a decade of experimentation by the 41-year-old artist with the dominant elements of postwar American abstraction. They also reflect his interest in photography.

In the early 1990s, Sheinkman created big gestural works by drawing with a flashlight on photo-sensitized linen. By the middle of the decade, like many abstractionists of the time, he had turned his attention to grids and stripes and began experimenting with unconventional formats, wrapping his canvases around cylinders or presenting them as scrolls.

Here he has returned to the traditional rectangular support, a development that might be interpreted as a move to "man the bastions" of painting during a time of great cultural stress and strain.

Sheinkman reports that figurative art is all the rage in New York. Meanwhile, across the country, artists

generally are responding to the changing global situation by infusing their work with social and psychological content.

Sheinkman, in contrast, is a formalist. His painter's mind is caught up in issues of form, space and perception — the world within the frame.

What he loves about abstraction is its implicit sense of adventure. "You don't know," he observed during an interview at the museum, "where you're going to end up."

Painting for Sheinkman is a balancing act between spontaneity and control.

The black arabesques that dominate several paintings began as sweeping arm gestures; the artist then went back in with his pencil to thicken and darken the lines.

He also made liberal use of an eraser in "painting" these works, using it as both a drawing tool and a way to "remove" negative space.

Born in Westchester, N.Y., Sheinkman earned a bachelor of

arts degree in art history and studio art at Princeton in 1985. Ten years later his work began to attract serious attention from curators and collectors. He has had solo shows at galleries in London, Japan, Berlin and New York; his work is represented in the collections of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

In his catalog essay, New York critic Mark Edelman praises Sheinkman's "ability to create a space that is at once apprehensible and enigmatic." He approves the work's "structural soundness" and the "inherent logic of its construction."

For all his command of painting's formal components, Sheinkman is not a purist. He embraces the fact that his paintings are evocative of "multiple shifting things," from the tracery of ice skates on a rink to pasta on the boil. Knowing that the artist worked for a

while in the Merchant Marine laying underwater cable and that as a child he was fascinated with cars, highways and airplanes adds grist to the mill.

These are anecdotal interpretations, however, of works that have more to say.

On a visceral level, their swooping, curving rhythms celebrate the euphoria of bodily movement. Standing in front of them, it is hard to restrain the urge to turn, twirl and dip.

Metaphorically, these linear scrabbles read as unraveled grids — the devolvment of order into chaos — which is not a bad thing.

The old ideas need a good scrambling now and then, not least among them the notion that after a century of innovation and exploration, abstraction has exhausted its potential.

"This," Sheinkman says, "is the beginning stage."

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ON EXHIBIT

THE SHOW: "New Works by Mark Sheinkman"

WHERE: Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, 4420 Warwick Blvd.,

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tuesday-Thursday; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday-Saturday; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Closed Mondays. The exhibit continues through April 10.

HOW MUCH: Free

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

(816) 753-5784 or

www.kemperart.org