

Art in America

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Pat Adams at Zabriskie

Primary colors, biomorphic forms and serpentine shapes spill through the abstract space of Pat Adams's 31-by-23-inch watercolor and gouache on paper titled *Ribbon of Breath* (1954). A joyous account of the cosmos on something like the fourth day of creation, this vibrant work is further enlivened by a crumpling and subsequent flattening of the support. The piece recalls the watercolors of both Kandinsky and the Argentine modernist Xul Solar.

This exhibition of 38 paintings and works on paper made between 1954 and 2004 was a



Pat Adams: *Ribbon of Breath*, 1954, watercolor and gouache on paper, 31 by 23 inches; at Zabriskie.

personal and professional milestone, commemorating an unflaggingly productive relationship between Adams and gallery owner Virginia Zabriskie, who has represented the artist and exhibited her work for 50 years. As was evident from the examples included here, Adams was independent

of the gestural concerns and preoccupation with size that characterized New York School painting at the inception of her career, and her work retains a sense of purposeful individuality.

Two small gouaches of 1957 share the density and luminosity associated with that medium. *The Gyres II* consists of handsomely brushed swirls of grays and dusty slate blues scattered with minuscule dots of brighter tones. The gaps between brush marks in the swooping ink and gouache of *In Principio II* reveal incidents of intense hues seemingly just beyond the picture plane. In the upper right Adams describes a single perfect circle with an outer band of an earthy tone, the inner a line of red circling a disk of yellow. Such circles and lines, plus arabesques and rectilinear passages, occur in most of the work that follows.

Adams's enjoyment of the juxtaposition of contained fields of acrylic, mica, sand and crayon radiates from a 19-by-11-inch painting titled *In the Way of Sense* (1977). Without overwhelming the eye, she reels through overlapping passages that include a sweeping band of pinkish-red with flecks of white and glistening mica, while in opposing corners, triangular forms imply rectilinear completion. In the midst of so much astral business, Adams introduces a relatively minute, intensely blue triangle edged by red and yellow, floating like some starship in elemental space.

In *Other* (1986), one disk appears to ride above another, eclipsed by a larger sphere. *Next Text* of 10 years later introduces three black spheres to one small white cube, organized like a roadmap through the stars. More recent works resolve in the rational organization of the grid, visual evidence of a concern for a clarity associated with the mathematics of truth and beauty. Throughout, Adams's work recalls Edna St. Vincent Millay's observation that "Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare," and, fearless, she continues to move on.

—Edward Leffingwell