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JOHN MILLER, Riko Mizuno Gallery:

The marking system—codified mélange of grave and acute accents—that JOHN MILLER consistently employs for his paintings mitigates their being looked at with consideration. They appear impenetrable; they are dismissed as Op art. Miller's stridently linear patterns, a march of parallel dashes moving against a countergrain of single lines, do inadvertently resemble some manner of optical illusion. But Miller's work transcends its own retinal effects. It represents a sustained effort at devising a truly modern painting, and one that, before it is anything else, can be seen to be marks on a flat surface.

Four paintings are shown here. Unprimed canvas serves as a ground in all of them. In two the marks are of dark, opaque colors; in the other two they are

white. (One of the latter is two abutted panels.) The scale of Miller's paintings is closely reasoned, as all components of this kind of insistently spare style must be, so that the vertical shapes appear immutable, correct. The horizontal white painting likewise seems not only justified in its sectional format but enriched by the real space that separates one panel from the other. Miller varies the internal bars from painting to painting, creating slightly different spatial ensembles. In any case, this is far from both the eccentric, ostensibly Euclidean universe of today's modernists, who see complication and contradiction as abstract painting's most powerful subject matter, and from the nether world of psychic space that apparently motivates the current wholesale revival of Expressionism in its many guises. Miller is an outsider in both camps; the "space" that he establishes is, in fact, more akin to motion than to any three-dimensional notation. One is forced to move across the surface of the paintings, eyes shuffling like feet in a Charleston dance step.

John Miller, *Untitled No. 21*, 1979, acrylic on raw canvas, 40½ x 62"



Reading the paintings one becomes involved in a visual glissando, made almost textural by the nearly imperceptible color changes within them—the blue graves interrupted by black acutes, for instance. The paintings' various densities allow for only so much penetration, only so much visual integration. Ferociously, puritanically abstract, they aspire to no wider meaning. They are noteworthy for their abandonment of metaphor; Miller proposes a pictorial space as free of associations as it is devoid of tactile analogies.

Brusque and self-contained, these are all-or-nothing paintings. Everything in them is subordinated to a compelling idea of abbreviated, all pervasive order. It may be predictable then that the strain inherent in successfully bridging a supposedly invariable mark across two separate surfaces in the horizontal white painting makes it at once the liveliest and most hospitable of the lot. The fracture is real, but the force of the will joining the canvases is of such strength that a fusion occurs.

—RICHARD ARMSTRONG