

L. A. IN REVIEW

An ancient formation with no traceable origin, the grid, as Rosalind Krauss suggests, has emblemized and threatened the modernist project. Reinvented tirelessly by Mondrian, Albers, LeWitt, et al.—each time with the passion and pride of invention—the grid stands as a chastening reminder of the impossibility of originality, even within a model so wildly celebratory of it.

Once more into the breach goes John Franklin (Dennis Anderson, June 23–July 28), his small canvases of uniformly spaced horizontals and perpendiculars rendered not in oil paint but in various thicknesses of black ribbon—from typewriter-sized on up. According to the artist, the squares of greens, blues, browns, and yellows—punctuating the grids in what appear to be accidental configurations—in fact compose landscapes as seen up close. In photographs, their surfaces devolving into illegible bits of color and light. Squares of yellow suggest the bright light of the sun, stacks of earth-toned squares hint at the parched ground, and vertical rows of green squares allude to trees in *Somewhere in Arizona*; constellations of white and then blue squares suggest the glare of snow and the bite of arctic seas in *Ice Station 1*.

Ingenuous claims aside (one thinks of Jeff Koons's insistence that his latest pieces are about the purity of porn queen/fiancée Cicciolina), there is more to Franklin's work than this. The images are less about landscape, less about the gridded matrix through which those landscapes are ostensibly viewed, than they are about gridlock—about a generation's panicked feeling of being trapped inside a system (read: modernism) with no way out, condemned to interminably circumnavigate the small space assigned by history.



John Franklin, *Which Way Did They Go?*, Gesso, Inked Cotton Ribbon, Oil, Paint, 48" x 30" x 1½".
Courtesy Dennis Anderson Gallery.

For Franklin, there is another alternative: to expose the grid, to deflate its pretensions to uniqueness and originality. His reference point is Mondrian, the Mondrian of the feverish *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, to whom most of his works implicitly refer; and the Mondrian of the early 1930s, to whom *Which Way Did They Go?* refers quite explicitly. Franklin's performance here differs from those of Sherrie Levine and Mike Bidlo in that Franklin apes the spirit rather than the letter of Mondrian's work, his Day-Glo colors an intentionally cockeyed version of Mondrian's primary palette, his piled and stacked rectangles a garbled mock-repetition of Mondrian's elegantly balanced odes to equilibrium. In this, his work is more closely aligned to that of Philip Taaffe, who has played so fast, loose, and wittily with the work of another one of Mondrian's fans—Barnett Newman.

The exhibition included three ink drawings on linen: one of a dog wagging its tail; the second of a buffalo; and the third of a "pioneer" wearing a coonskin cap and brandishing a gun. Rendered in a quick, impersonal style, the images reek of mass production while spelling out American-style clichés; what they offer is a wholehearted embrace of the inauthentic. But though the drawings complement the grid works thematically, they are disjunctive formally, and finally serve little purpose other than to weaken an otherwise strong show.

by Susan Kandell