

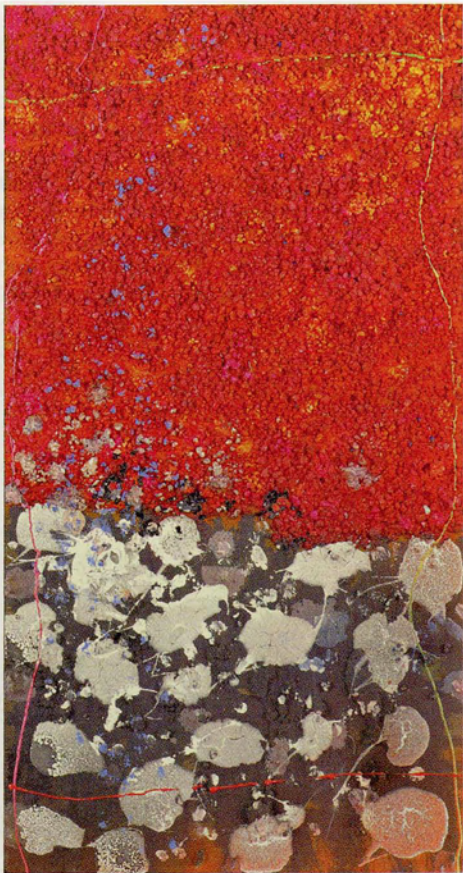
Stanley Boxer

SPANIERMAN MODERN

Stanley Boxer (1926–2000) has been called a Color Field painter, but I don't think that does justice to his works—or at least not to the paintings he made in the 1990s, nineteen of which were on view in this exhibition (along with one canvas from 1960 and one from 1973). In these works, Boxer's fields of color are not as uniformly smooth as Ellsworth Kelly's in his hard-edge Color Field paintings, nor are they as ingeniously blended, even magically merged, as Morris Louis's in his stained paintings. What distinguishes Boxer's paint-saturated canvases from these supposed epitomes of the Color Field mode is their opulence, their (some would say) rank profusion of colors. At their best, as in *Broideriesfromadark* and *Paradisicalsuccors*, both 1990, they are a kind of luxury painting, in the Latin sense of *luxuria*—that is, they involve an extravagant excess of color. Such hedonistically engrossing, overripe colors contrast with Kelly's puritan tidiness and Louis's calculated intricacy, his peculiarly discreet sensuousness.

The paintings of Kelly and Louis keep us at a “hygienic” aesthetic distance. We don't really get emotionally involved with their paintings; we look in supposedly stunned awe. In comparison, Boxer's are unhygienically sensual; they draw us into their delirium. Their textural richness and lush colors run riot with our senses and engage our emotions, finally overwhelming us with orgiastic plenitude. They cannot simply be contemplated. They are antireductionist, or at least post-reductionist: They splurge, as though beside themselves, exuberantly uncontrollable, even as their details are as exacting as Kelly's and as nuanced as Louis's. The delicious abundance and liveliness of Boxer's works—in contrast with the ingrown flatness (and peculiarly flattened, not to say inhibited, affect) of the modishly restrained modernist canvas—deprived them of their important place in the history of abstract painting.

Boxer was a sculptor as well as a painter, and lived in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, close to nature. *Paradisicalsuccors* literally incorporates pieces of the natural world: Its upper half is a sort of mosaic of small rocks, painted red with blue highlights. The mosaic's haptic quality makes the red powerfully visceral, almost erotic, yet the floral splotches of gray-white in the bleaker lower half suggest nature in decline. This dualism is almost always a feature of Boxer's work. Another example is *Einnachtverloren* (Lostnight), 1997, in which a grim region of black and brown is paired with a modulated “spectrum” of colors (lightly toned red, blue, and purple) in a light-speckled brownish area to the left. Boxer's work reminds us of Hans Hofmann's belief that painting is “a process of metabolism, whereby color transubstantiates into vital forces that become the real sources of painterly life.” It is not just a thing in itself.



Stanley Boxer,
Paradisicalsuccors,
1990, mixed media on
board, 26 1/2 x 13 3/4".

—Donald Kuspit