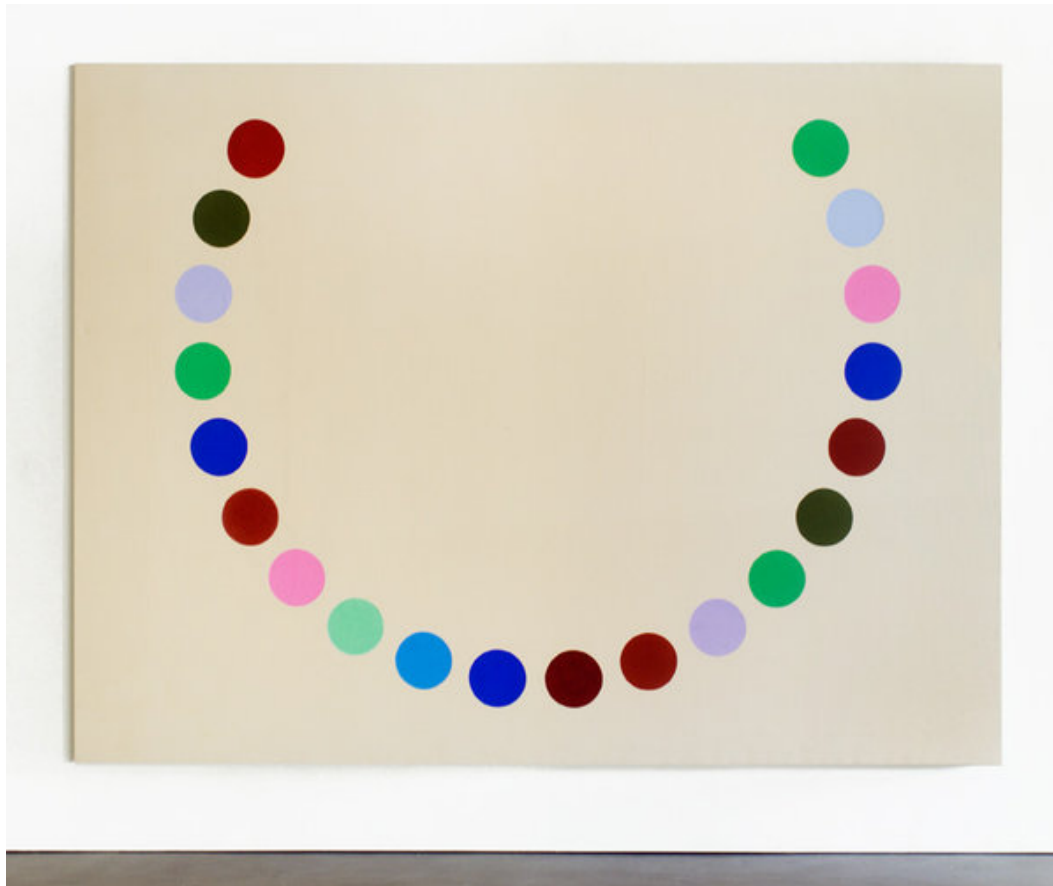


Diane Rosenstein Fine Art

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Review: A refreshing study of 'The Washington School'



Thomas Downing, "Horseshoe Two," 1971. (Diane Rosenstein Fine Art)

By David Pagel
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At Diane Rosenstein Fine Art, “The Washington School” happily demonstrates that great art beats great criticism, even if it takes some time for that to happen.

Fifty years ago, Clement Greenberg claimed that Color Field painting was the be-all and end-all of Western civilization. For a few heady years, museums across the country gobbled up abstract canvases by such Washington painters as Leon Berkowitz, Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, Morris Louis, Howard Mehring and Kenneth Noland.

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Critics who disagreed with Greenberg quickly took issue with the far-fetched claims he made about this type of painting. The tide quickly turned as Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptualism rose to prominence, leaving Color Field in the dust.

Then something strange happened. Art schools proliferated. Theory got trendy. Academics picked Greenberg out of the dustbin of history only to throw him back into it, with bombastic drama, all the better to pretend they had real power. The art Greenberg celebrated got buried by the semesterly reenactments of his slaying.

A couple of generations later, such L.A. painters as Linda Besemer, Ingrid Calame and Monique Prieto looked back, with fresh eyes, at works by the Washington School. The optimistic possibilities and free-wheeling hedonism they saw in Color Field painting became a potent source for their own exuberantly charged and ambitiously original works.

Their revisionist view is given physical form by the 14 airy paintings in “The Washington School,” whose crisp simplicity is sensuous and stimulating, as pleasurable as the day they were made — and maybe even more refreshing.

Diane Rosenstein Fine Art, 9399 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 397-9225, through Aug. 25. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.dianeroseinstein.com