

Art in America

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REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

NEW YORK

Carter Hodgkin at Cheryl Pelavin

This exhibition of 24 recent works by Virginia-born New York painter Carter Hodgkin featured large and medium-size oil-on-canvas pieces as well as smaller works on paper, including a number of monotypes. In her work of the past 20 years, Hodgkin has employed scientifically derived imagery. For the recent series "Aftereffects," on view here, her source material was electron microscopy that records the activity of neurons deep inside the brain. The works feature all-over compositions in which the superimposition of reticulated lines or irregular patterns of cellular outlines, or a combination of both, are set against dark red or blue grounds. The thin blue lines correspond to the neurons that have been magnified and scanned, and then projected and traced onto the canvas or paper. There is a remarkable consistency in the lines, each being about a quarter inch wide and uniform in texture.

Using an assortment of dyes, along with enamel and acrylic paint, the artist pours and spills thin washes of pigment over the surfaces to create turbulent fields. While basically flat and evenly applied, the layers of color suggest ambiguous spaces that encompass incidents of light and shade as well as areas of atmospheric depth.

Hodgkin, whose studio is located just a few blocks from the World Trade Center site, included in "Aftereffects" several paintings with deep blue grounds that relate to the events of Sept. 11. In works such as *Fear Circuit*, the compressed composition of contrasting colors and agitated lines refers to the wrenching mental anguish triggered by the disaster and the loss of cognition in the face of catastrophe.

In one of the show's most striking works, *Dendric Release*, batches of irregular parallel blue lines form wiry tentacles extending across and down the large canvas from the upper right corner against deep red clouds in the background. From these lines, myriad markings branch in all directions; the composition suggests a loosely woven net unfurling as it is flung across a blood-red sea. In this work and throughout this tightly focused show, Hodgkin successfully explores a phenomenological terrain in which scientific precision and artistic imagination help illuminate the mysterious workings of the brain.

—Gerard McCarthy



Carter Hodgkin: *Dendric Release*, 2002, dye, enamel and acrylic on canvas, 60 by 48 inches; at Cheryl Pelavin. (Review on p. 137.)