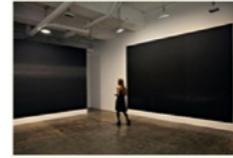


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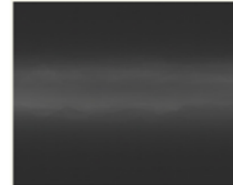
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"Eugene Lemay: Navigator," installation view, 2012, Mike Weiss gallery, New York



Eugene Lemay
Unbounded-2
2012
Mike Weiss Gallery, New York



Eugene Lemay
Sala (medium)
2012
Mike Weiss Gallery, New York



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Eugene Lemay FLYING BLIND: EUGENE LEMAY'S ABSTRACTIONS by Donald Kuspit

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Eugene Lemay was once a navigator in the Israeli Army, working at night to determine the enemy's position. He moved towards the thin line of light that is the horizon, mapping his position as he did so. Disoriented in the desert, where invisible death lurked, he was guided by the light, a sort of spiritual compass, for it was implicitly the sacred light every religion worshipped -- and Israel, however officially Jewish, is a place of many religions, indeed, it is where the three major religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, each overlapping in their basic beliefs and even in their ritualistic practices, sequentially originated.

Lemay's dark abstractions recapitulate this memorable experience. They're morbid yet hopeful, for a sort of inner light emanates from them. From the distance, we are looking into the opaque darkness of a desert -- into a desolate wasteland, meaningless, empty, abysmal. Coming close to the paintings -- some are 20 feet long, engulfing one in their vastness, inhuman because no human body can take its measure -- we see that, in intimate fact, the paintings are composed of horizontal bands of Hebrew letters, forming blurred words. They're unreadable scrawls, like the bizarrely shaped Kufic letters that simulated Hebrew writing in medieval religious paintings.

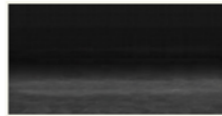
And Lemay's paintings are mournfully religious: he has scrambled the texts of handwritten letters that were left unsent by the Israeli soldiers who served with Lemay -- unsent because they were killed in action, killed on the dismal battlefield of the desert, fought over since antiquity. The battle can never be won -- the desert always wins -- suggesting its foolishness: the folly of war haunts Lemay's abstractions by way of the ghostly writing ritualistically traced on them.



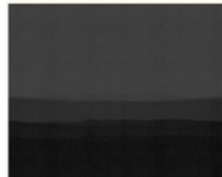
"Eugene Lemay: Navigator,"
Installation view, 2012, Mike
Weiss gallery, New York



"Eugene Lemay: Navigator,"
Installation view, 2012, Mike
Weiss gallery, New York



Eugene Lemay
Solo I
2012
Mike Weiss Gallery, New York



Eugene Lemay
Sight I
2012
Mike Weiss Gallery, New York



"Eugene Lemay: Navigator,"
Installation view, 2012, Mike
Weiss gallery, New York



"Eugene Lemay: Navigator,"
Installation view, 2012, Mike
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This is not **Hanne Darboven's** compulsively meaningless repetitious pseudo-texts, with their impersonal writing that could have been made by machine, so rote-like is it, not by an idiosyncratic, highly individual hand, but profoundly meaningful texts, all the more profound because they are unrepeatable, personal, organically alive, and have been obscured by time.

Lemay digitalizes the words of the letters, excruciatingly painting the microscopic details by hand, implicitly identifying with the dead soldiers, suggesting his survivor's guilt, for which he atones by piling the details on the blackness, the way Jews put small stones on the graves of their ancestors and kin, in memory of the visit to their graves. And to signal that they, or at least their memorable remains, will endure to eternity, as stone does -- stone which also signals the stubborn strength of the Jews (reminding us that in antiquity they were called a stubborn people for not submitting to material, named idols, but rather abiding by the unnamable pure spirit that moved, physically and emotionally, the material world at will).

Ad Reinhardt's dead-ended abstraction in darkness, dividing his canvas into a grid as though darkness could be geometrically mapped. One always knew where one was in Reinhardt's darkness; one could always navigate one's way from modular unit to modular unit of flat space. It was an ahistorical, emotionally meaningless and vacuous darkness, even as it becomes a peculiarly safe, esthetically comfortable place to be. Lemay reminds us that dread, death, memory, suffering, loss, insecurity have their home in darkness, which is why one is never at home in it, and why one can never feel secure in it, and never find one's way through and out of it.

And he reminds us that darkness is never flat, but peculiarly palpable, touchable -- haptically felt not just seen -- for it touches us. History always has its dark side, and Lemay has restored history to darkness, and with that taken us out of and beyond Reinhardt's inert darkness, and more deeply into darkness -- engulf us in rather keeps it at a distance, as Reinhardt does -- for Lemay sees the ironically eternal light at the end of the long dark tunnel of history.

His paintings are wailing walls haunted by the spirits of those who defended them when they were the walls of a fortress and temple. Lemay's elegiac abstractions show that the bones of abstraction can dance in the desert when the light of God falls on them -- for what else is God but the light that accumulates in the darkness, that leaves memory traces in it, the subtly visible light that makes the invisible dead mournful presence, indeed, what else is God but the distilled spirits of the dead in all their atmospheric formlessness -- which is why they have more presence than Reinhardt's minimalized, apathetic darkness.

Lemay maximalizes and re-emotionalizes darkness by making the most of the pathetic blighted light in it. Lemay shows us that we don't have to mourn for abstraction if we seriously mourn for the figures lurking in it.

"Eugene Lemay: Navigator," Mar. 29-Apr. 28, 2012, Mike Weiss Gallery, 520 West 24th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001.

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