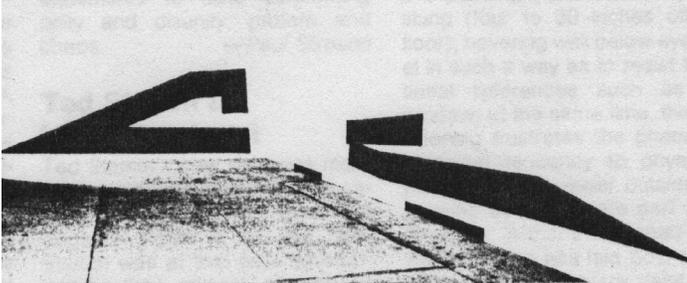


TED STAMM AT HARM BOUCKAERT

BY SANFORD KWINTER



Ted Stamm: (left) *SLDR-001*, 1981-82, 67 x 186 inches, (right) *ZCT-002*, 1982, 30 x 210 inches, both oil on canvas.

Ted Stamm's new paintings mark an important development in a career whose concerns were first cogently stated in the late '60s. Stamm was at that time developing his light, almost diaphanous Minimalist monochromes into achromatic "cancel" paintings in which all color or image was systematically obliterated by means of vehement eraser-fluid-like application of thick black paint over the entire picture surface. The effect was a complex one, wavering between coquettish expressivity (some of the original color seemed always to show through somewhere) and pure, determined nihilism. The monochromes, stripped of their chromatic lightness, had become extraordinarily dense, high-mass objects whose inertia seemed to press downward and back towards some invisible structural support. (Serra's sculpture would almost invariably come to mind.) In this way, Stamm's work had ceased being "painting" in any but the most superficial sense.

The recent show presented what might have passed, back in the Minimalist heyday, under the rubric of "objects" but, given the development of Minimalist ontology that this work represents, can be properly expressed perhaps only in terms of pure moment or quanta of force.

Of the eight works in the show, four were hall-scale models, prototypes or drawings—any of which could be read as "programs" or specifications for the four principal works in the main gallery space. These latter consist of massive yet perfectly sleek aerodynamic shapes (though assembled from such decidedly "slow" materials as wood stretcher and canvas), each spanning nearly 20 feet and rising (with one exception) no more than 30 inches. These

works, which at first recall traditional rectangular canvases collapsed by the physics of acceleration, give way to an impression of extremely delicate tensor structures built according to machine rather than human tolerances. Thus the "front" ends of *ZCT-002* and *C-Dodger* compress neatly into an acute 13 degree angle, making the rest of the work seem to develop in a long expanding horizontal sweep behind it or else appear as a lagging form of unconverted mass still caught in a state of becoming.

The works hang from the walls like paintings, but extremely low slung (four to 30 inches off the floor), hovering well below eye level in such a way as to resist traditional references such as the window; at the same time, this positioning frustrates the phenomenological tendency to physically posit a human viewer outside the painting as an intimate part of its structure. Within the shaped canvases Stamm has laid bold architectonic bands of black paint (one D-type painting uses silver paint) which read almost as beams or oblique edges of slabs of great weight and inertia. Though the surface is slick and utterly uniform, this is the same, ever-recurring Stamm-black which, since the first "cancel" paintings, has served as both nihilist erasure and signifier of mass and gravity.

Some of the complexity of these works derives from their close, floor-hugging positions where the obvious suggestion of gravity is in part subverted by the neat asymptotic tracer line that they form along the "horizon." Only *SLDR-001* seems to have more mass than speed (and perhaps for this reason hovers closest to the floor), already an entropic element in a system making excessive demands on available energy. Stamm has succeeded in transforming the gallery into a field of pure force: no longer the static, metric articulations of body / non-body relationships of Minimalism, here all relations are virtualities in which terms are subject to instant conversion, where time seems to exist only as infinitesimal moments, and space only as a function of tensor variables. True, one experiences these works as sheer physical presences—but in terms of their effects. In a period when most important art has temporarily ceded the spotlight to frivolous celebration of tired modes and media, Stamm's work seems an important contribution to the field of post-Minimalist practice which, since Smithson, has continued in its attempt to found an ontology and theory of nature free from the metaphysics of objecthood.