



TED STAMM

BY STEPHEN WESTFALL

Ted Stamm is interested in the "objectness" of his paintings and discusses their pictorial qualities reluctantly. In fact, the paintings do challenge a viewer's conventional reading of the pictorial image by allowing image with sleek shapes resembling silhouettes for aerodynamically advanced autos or hovercraft. Stamm furthers the high-tech, sculptural associations by hanging them only a foot or two above the gallery floor, where they seem to be on the verge of scooting off their moorings for a floor-skimming spin around the room.

But it is precisely Stamm's acute pictorial sensibility that enables him to hold these go-kart abstractions in place. A single wide band of either black or silver paint, flush to the edge of the stretcher, follows the shape to where it overlaps at its starting point. This motion runs counter to the direction the nose of the canvas is pointing. In some of the paintings the band is broken, picking up again along the top back slope of the canvas. However, the overlap is the excruciatingly calculated point of pressure that anchors the eye to the stern of the piece.

These intelligent paintings run counter to the expressionist temperament of the moment. They spring from a tradition that includes the earlier Stella, Mangold, Kelly and even the eccentric "placing" of miniature canvases by Gene Davis. It is the constructivist tradition in abstraction as opposed to the expressionistic one. (Barnett Newman would not fall into this tradition, for instance, despite the hard-edged format of his canvases.) The psychological urgency of expressionism has been suppressed for a more disciplined examination of form and perception. In as much as this

is a rational mode of address, it is both optimistic and utopian. The increasing subtlety of Stamm's formal language and the growth of his paintings' ability to do things have been the rewards of his rigor. If the expressionistic impulse is to dig for transcendence, Stamm's is to refine. The doggedness of his pursuit is itself an expression of faith, a notion that might strike Stamm as either sentimental or no fun. (Harm Bouckaert, October 6-30)

Ted Stamm, *ZCT-003*, 1982. Oil on canvas, 30 x 120 inches.