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Osborne's abstracts

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For The Inquirer

Elizabeth Osborne's explorations in abstraction made their debut in her Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts retrospective of 2009, paintings of horizontal bands of brilliant colors from a series titled "Lux" that hinted at a new direction for this Philadelphia artist. Osborne, who until then was known mainly for her color-stained images of interiors and landscapes, had in fact been moving toward pure abstraction as early as 2004. Even so, the "Lux" paintings marked a bold change.

Since then, Osborne has continued to combine horizontal stripes of color in her paintings, but has also taken on the square and vertical stripes. Works in all three modes make up her first exhibition at Locks Gallery composed entirely of abstract paintings.

In some of her works, a stretched canvas is inserted in the center of a larger stretched canvas, the smaller one giving the effect of a view through a window or of the contents of a secret box.

Homage to E.A. (2008-2009), shown in her retrospective, is the earliest of these two-part works, showing a geometric painting in the style of the late Edna Andrade in the inset panel, and a stretched-canvas frame around it. The inset panel in Crevice II (2010) depicts a dark-red vertical stripe with pink on either side, followed by bars of white. It's a frankly sexual image, and yet it is purely abstract.

The sublime "Lux" paintings are here, as are some newer paintings of horizontal stripes, such as Awakening (2010), which show Osborne working with darker, moodier color. Winter Solstice II (2010) and Equinox II (2010) are stripe paintings on panels set inside painted canvas frames. Of the two-part works, these two make the best use of the canvas-within-a-canvas format because, in both cases, the painted outer frame seems more obviously related to its inner panel.

It's clear that Osborne is still experimenting, but I hope she'll continue the horizontal stripes. In a world populated by stripe paintings, they manage to be distinctly hers.



Elizabeth Osborne's painting "Lux III" (2009), a series marking her move to pure abstraction, at Locks Gallery to March 30.

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