

The Philadelphia Inquirer

A decade of luminous work

by EDITH NEWHALL

Published: January 22, 2020

If your New Year's resolution was to reduce the stress in your life, consider spending some quiet time with Warren Rohrer's 14 sublime abstract paintings in the Locks Gallery exhibition "A Silent Call: Paintings from the 1980s."

The late Pennsylvania artist (1927-1995) was born in Lancaster County and spent much of his life there. In 1984, he and his wife, Jane, moved to a house in Chestnut Hill that had been the studio of the Philadelphia painter Violet Oakley.



Hyphen, 1989, oil on linen, 28 inches x 28 inches

He wrote in a sketchbook at that time that his "painting attitude" had changed, although you can see the shift a few years earlier away from his carefully measured markings and horizontal bands toward amorphous fields of marks and calligraphic scratchings.

His earlier works had been inspired by the grid patterns of Lancaster County fields. His '80s paintings seem more informed by the color of the sky at different times of day.

Rohrer had never shied away from strong color, but he was embracing it wholeheartedly in this period. Deep phthalo and viridian greens began showing up regularly in his large works, along with turquoise, violet, and magenta. Some paintings, including *Hyphen* (1989) and *Matrix* (1985), combine those hues in an atmospheric haze.

In the '90s, Rohrer began incorporating esoteric writing and images suggestive of prehistoric cave paintings in his "Field: Language" series of paintings. So the supremely luminous paintings here are from a moment in time to savor.

In April, a show called "Hearing the Brush" at Woodmere Art Museum will focus on the interplay between Rohrer's paintings and his wife's poetry, promising more quiet contemplation ahead.

The current "Silent Call" exhibition is on display in Locks' 2nd floor gallery. On the way up, take in the "Assemblages" group show on the ground floor, with works by Edna Andrade, Joseph Cornell, Charles Fahlen, Ray Johnson, Robert Motherwell, and Louise Nevelson.

Through Feb. 15 at Locks Gallery, 600 S Washington Square, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tue.-Sat. 215-629-1000 or locksgallery.com.

© 2020 THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

