

## The purity of color

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'Cool Down — Heat Up,' a group show at State of the Arts Gallery, includes pastel drawings and acrylic paintings by Jill Hoffman-Kowal. These colorful geometric abstractions reference the midcentury abstract expressionist art of Mark Rothko.

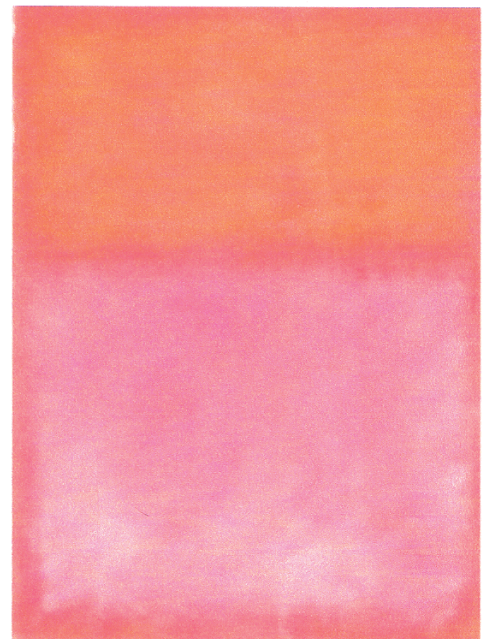
'I began these drawings and paintings for the fun of it,' Hoffman-Kowal said. "I saw it as a chance to change direction from my previous painting. As simple as Rothko's work looks, once you start really looking, you realize it's difficult to make them work — the balance and depth of color ... their almost statuesque presence ... it's not easy to do."

Hoffman-Kowal's career began in the 1970s as an undergraduate at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland with tight photo-realist paintings. In 1983 she moved to Sarasota. Pure abstract grid paintings replaced image and color. This brought attention to the process of painting itself through highly textured rhythmic strokes of thick white or gray paint that change direction within each square of the grid.

Later this device evolved into "poetry paintings," placing a letter inside each square of the grid. The paintings are sophisticated, conceptual works that function as visual aphorisms.

By the mid-'90s she began making "serious grid paintings with handmade acrylic paints." Well-constructed, vibrant works once again gave emphasis to the classical harmonies of geometric order.

Superficially, the present work has little in common with her previous output, other



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Rothko Series - Orange and Magenta by  
Jill Hoffman-Kowal

than a reliance on geometry. Throughout her career, however, there has always been an implicit belief in the therapeutic nature of pure color and reductivist design.

Her work always conveys a direct correlation with the ups and downs of her life and the healing qualities of art.

The drawings and paintings in "Cool Down — Heat Up" do not have the conceptual or physical epic grandeur of Rothko, or his transgressive (for its time) daring; but in their depth of purpose, chromatic and spatial subtleties, like his, they record a particular characteristic of much Jewish-American art: An obligation to tikkun olam, fixing the universe by actively improving the world into which you were born. In the 20th century, through this belief, an art of transcendence rooted in suffering is evident. The Talmud, a book of Jewish civil and religious law, reflects on these issues when it states, "The deeper the sorrow, the less tongue it has."

In the right hands the silence of color equals the power of speech. Hoffman-Kowal's art is a case in point.