

A Demolition Derby of A

By Tim Porges

The experience of walking in on the Illinois State University Gallery's *Post-Hypnotic* exhibit is a sort of visual demolition derby. A bunch of old vehicles — Op, Arte Povera, psychedelia, post-modernism and so on — have been rehabilitated and turned loose on each other. It feels dangerous to get between them as they try to knock each other off the wall.

Some are more immediately aggressive than others. Mike Scott's neo-Op stripes actually repel the eye. The hallucinatory color that appears to hover over his surfaces becomes visible only when your eyes lose the battle and slip defensively out of focus. My own best guess about the difference between Scott's work (as well as Philip Taaffe's *Big Iris*) and the mid-'60s Op painters to whom it owes so much is that it's made for an audience that's willing to look at it longer than anyone ever looked at a Bridget Riley, an audience that expects more out of the experience than a headache and visual afterglow. We expect some kind of deeper reward, like the listeners who sat through the endless-loop repetitions of early minimalist compositions. Even in a survey presentation such as this, in which each artist is allowed no more than a single representative performance, we expect some kind of revelation, like the miraculous appearance of Elvis on a taco, but more abstract and less easily defined.

While the roots of this work go deep into the abstractions of 80 and more years ago, the baseline for its audience (in the Universal Boomer Time of contemporary culture) is to be found at mid-century, when Mom and Dad came home from the wars to live the Atomic life. While history (the original

abstraction) might repeat its tragedies as farces, art history's primal moments are always already nostalgic, already sturdily farcical in their self-awareness. The moments to which these paintings return us were all moments of recuperative nostalgia. I'm trying to define an edge here, between the two regimens of the art of our time (and maybe they were always there, but nowadays they're up on the surface where everybody can see them): the rule of novelty and the rule of nostalgia. For each of the artists in this show, either novelty or nostalgia offers a way of organizing your first encounter, and then there's the second-encounter switch-over, and you see the novelty that runs in constant parallel track with the nostalgia, making the work simultaneously dated and timeless, shocking and comfy, familiar and uncanny, repellent and attractive. And as your first look is followed by the second and third and so on, this back-and-forth viewing becomes part of the process, part of your repertoire of visual skills. It's a familiar skill, really. You've been developing it for years, playing computer games, puzzling out magic-eye images, reading *Ray Gun* and *Wired*, watching MTV. A little recreational drug-taking will take you there, too, though it's not a required part of the curriculum.

As with any demolition derby, the pure spectacle of this show is what it's really all about: the deafening roar of visual noise. The individual contestants (some old heroes from the instant movements of the '80s, some people still on the rising edge of their career curves) each has more to offer than pure spectacle, and like any good survey

