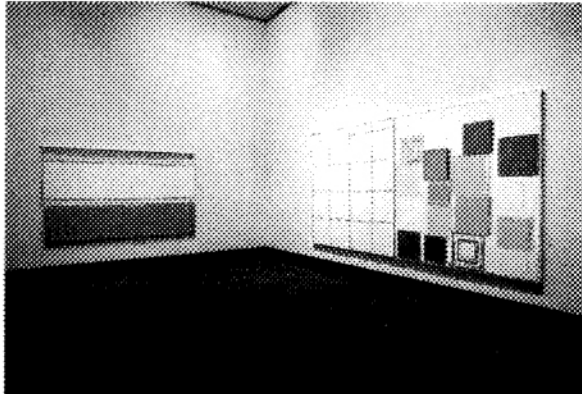


## REVIEWS



**DAN WALSH**

left: *Vehicle*, 2000. Acrylic on canvas, 55" x 90".

right: *Untitled*, 2000. Acrylic on canvas, two panels, 70" x 70" each.

## INDIANA

**DAN WALSH**

INDIANAPOLIS MUSEUM OF ART  
1200 W. 38TH ST., 46208  
317/923-1331

It seemed unlikely that New York artist Dan Walsh would find receptive audiences in Indianapolis. His artwork is just the kind Midwest art viewers love to hate—it's frustratingly abstract, and simplistically cryptic—and it's the kind of artwork curators love to love. The curators of this show thus had a formidable task at hand in convincing visitors that Walsh has something compelling to say.

Are color-field paintings best left to their Modernist originators, or is there still something to say using the basic building blocks of this form? Walsh's canvases are tightly composed yet expansive juxtapositions of floating squares neatly lined up. His hues never quite sink into the canvas, yet their lightness is part of their charm. His series of six large paintings contains pastels, primary colors, and combinations of both that are unlike the rich, sustaining tones employed by the progenitors of color-field painting. Walsh's pastels float rather than overwhelm, their weightlessness seeming literally to play on color-field painting's lofty ideas about visual saturation. An occasional shock of red wakes up the canvases, and viewers' psyches.

Walsh's paintings present a wealth of possibilities concerning the psychology of

art. *Example* looks like a four-eyed machine with two sky-blue gaping mouths, as if to say, "Technology will eat you up!" We all know it already has, but viewers are left wondering whether this is indeed the kind of pondering Walsh wishes to inspire. *Vehicle* is more obvious, and quiet: instead of squares, a white track runs horizontally across the canvas with bands of bluish gray bordering its edges, flanked by a shoulder of violet purple. It seems to say, "Hit the road, and it could take you anywhere—or you could take it anywhere."

Curator Lena Vigna admits in her catalogue essay that Walsh's paintings are "ambiguous," and it is just that ambiguity that makes them compelling. Because the work is abstract, based on placing simple shapes in and out of relation to one another, any larger, non-formal intentions the artist may have are unclear. Walsh achieves that aesthetic mystery for which artists continue to strive, offending some and comforting others. But Walsh is saying something with his blocks of color, even if we're not quite sure what it is. In the end, while nonfigurative, Walsh's paintings still inspire sensual empathy—after all, lines and squares can represent people too, or at least they remind us that it's what we do with them that counts.

*Julie Pratt McQuiston is editor-in-chief of Arts Indiana in her home city of Indianapolis.*