

# ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 1972, VOL. 11, NO. 4

Edward Clark  
141 PRINCE STREET

Edward Clark is concerned with surface to about the same extent that Youngerman is not. In his most recent work the surfaces are thickly encrusted, asserting the physicality of their medium with obdurate aggressiveness yet emitting light and seeming to contain atmosphere. The three constants in Clark's painting are horizontal striping, an active surface, and an obsession with the ellipse as his personal hieratic image.

Clark's exhibition covered three years and as many distinct solutions to his basic problem of maintaining a valid relationship between the ellipse and the canvas edge. His earliest, and most obvious method of doing this in a unified way was to identify the oval with the field by shaping the canvas elliptically. (This was a very natural thing for him to do since he made his first eccentrically shaped canvas in 1956 for a Brata Gallery exhibition.) The largest oval painting in his show, *Calm Force* of 1970, is divided into three color areas. The upper third is a soft, weighty, baby blue which grates against the pink of the lower third with sweet-sour pungency. These areas are separated by a wide section of indeterminable hue—something between a silvery white and a greenish gray. Even in this, his most clearly demarcated work, the edges are blurred and each color invades the others. His image is arrived at very automatically. He pushes a 4' broom loaded with paint in long straight strokes nonstop from one side of the painting to the other. This technique descends directly from Pollock's drip and implies the same kind of energy.

In a group of transitional paintings the ellipse is placed squarely in the middle of a rectangular field of raw or painted, but unmodulated, canvas. The result is not completely convincing because the figure-ground relationship is too simple, the oval appearing as either a window in or a flat disc on top of the picture plane. He has found a much more successful solution with his most recent paintings like *Pink Top* and *Silver Stripes*. In these enormous rectangles (both are 9'6" x 13'7") the ellipse is cut by the painting edge at the sides causing it to read as a truncated form and implying the existence of more of it beyond the canvas.

Horizontality is stressed with great force in Clark's new paintings. The oval is so completely embedded within the screen of colored stripes passing through the surface that it emerges to graphic dominance (in *Pink Top*) only spottily and as a reserved line of removed masking tape. The stripes that weave horizontally through, over, and under the oval are stopped by it at various points, adding an additional level of complexity. His stripes, unlike Kenneth Noland's, imply an Abstract Expressionist velocity in keeping with their means of execution. Their interruption by the oval, which serves to vary their lengths, hints at infinite extension in a way similar to that of a Mondrian "tipped-square" painting.

But as a result of its rich facture, Clark's work relates most closely to the recent "rainstorm" paintings of Larry Poons. Poons' color tends to be grayed out by his pouring method of paint application, only breaking up into distinct areas of coloristic intensity when viewed close up. Paradoxically, Clark's color registers as large areas of more or less pinkness, greenness, whiteness or blueness from a distance when the stripes coalesce optically, but it breaks down into areas of nondefinable hue when it is seen up close. His color, basically indeterminate since

its process of application necessarily merges hues without blending them, recalls beautiful Abstract Expressionist “noncolor.”

Once again (and it seems like it must be for the hundredth time this year) we have been given another chance to decide how we feel about the “new Realism” in painting. But this modest Fischbach exhibition could make converts out of the most recalcitrant modernist. Granted the premise—the validity of a Pop art attitude toward 19th-century art in 1972—and the technical advances that gave it birth—the opaque projector, the colored snapshot, and the airbrush—recent realistic painting could be doing and saying great things. But it generally doesn’t. As a friend of mine recently said, “If I see one more airbrushed hubcap, I’m going to cry.”

—April Kingsley