



**Green Beret, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36"**

**Exhibition of Paintings by**

# **Gerald Hayes**

**at the Art Gallery,**

**Stockton State College, Pomona, NJ**

**November 27 – December, 14 1990**

## Hayes' Pragmatic American Formalism

At the outset of Modernism- the two branches: Utopian and expressionist- there was an implication that the abstract mode of representation was a spiritual act or quest; that, in fact, to engage in the act of abstract painting was an absolutist position, a replacement for the lost romantic impulses of a former bucolic era. Abstraction, whether Suprematist or Die Brüche, was a property of the spiritual mind, a transcendent outlook that equivocated the senses and the concept, between the perfection of a Neo-platonist world and the imperfection of a displaced immanence. Indeed, it was a European intellectual sensibility that informed the basis of abstract painting as a shift away from narrative or sublime representation.

With Gerald Hayes another kind of abstraction has become visible, one that partakes of an American pragmatic sensibility, contradiction between the practical motive and the sensory impulse. There is a maneuvering of the painterly field in Hayes' work that pulls both attributes in focus. The making of shapes is not a discursive activity but a reflected one. Hayes is formalist, first and foremost, but a particular kind of formalist. His authority is partially emanating from a remake of the sublime in nearly constructivist terms. I have never liked the term "Neo-Constructivist" but I do accept that Hayes carries a certain authority from the early Modernist that is deeply embedded in his sense of structure. An acrylic painting on canvas called *Green Beret* (1987), has the color and configuration of a Rodchenko there is a certain lightness about the process and an airy feeling to the surface. This type of formalism is not about lyricism or the emotionally charged brushstroke, but about the definitive shape as textural nuance; and it is precisely this shape/texture that establishes the field. The term "field" is also problematic in relation to the way Hayes

works. His paintings do not suggest the same resonance as Color Field painting, for example. While his paintings are possessed by a clarity of resolution and literalness, there is rarely an encumbrance that implies a forced statement. Yet the feeling of process- that is, the assertion of temporality- is also pervasive in Hayes' painting. One may get this from *Vail* or from *The Brothers*, both from 1990. In either case, the build-up of shape/texture develops a spatial engagement that is not so much about a field but about a language of form, a formality, executed according to a scheme or a system. Yet even the term "system", in any rigid sense is finally inadequate, because Hayes is not concerned with the compression of the surface as much as letting it breathe.

One might speak of Gerald Hayes' paintings as having a kind of resonance, a form of luminosity. These terms are also problematic in that they suggest a deviation from a pragmatic approach. Yet luminosity is, in fact, the outcome of a practical shifting of the material planes, an arbitrary manufacturing of light. In Hayes' paintings, one senses a concept of surface that is the result of reflection by way of his material concerns. It is a quality of surface that offers another view of formalism, one that combines constructivism and a pragmatic quest for the sublime. These are paintings that engage our thinking in relation to the manner of how we perceive them.

Robert C. Morgan

**Mr. Morgan is the New York editor of Tema Celeste, a contemporary review, and a contributor to ARTS Magazine.**