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BY COLIN GARDNER

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With every other 20th-Century art movement becoming easy grist for the Post-Modernist mill, it's hardly surprising to find geometric abstractionists turning for inspiration to the philosophical purism of Russian Constructivism. This is particularly true of Denzil Hurley, a Barbados-born painter whose loose, salon-style installations recall the early Suprematist experiments of Kasimir Malevich.

Working in impastoed oils on small, wooden panels, Hurley builds up a series of interlocking and overlapping geometric shapes --grids, vertical and horizontal planes, occasional diagonals and circles--to create exercises in pure form, what Malevich called "the spirit of nonobjective sensation which pervades everything."

Hurley works on both macro and micro levels, not only creating dynamic compositions in each individual panel, but also within the gallery as a whole. Each painting acts as a sort of floating “window,” forcing us to re-evaluate the spatial parameters of the environment while simultaneously reinforcing the hegemony of the rectangle and square.

Hurley is equally concerned with color and surface, but he eschews the pristine, hard-edge juxtapositions associated with De Stijl in favor of thick, highly tactile swaths of oscillating color. There is a distinct muddiness about all these works, a dialectic between strict order and free improvisation that suggests a conflict between self-effacement and a more expressionistic sensibility.

One might question the whole strategy of reviving Constructivist tenets in an age when ideology becomes mere informational fodder within a broader pluralistic scheme. Given the distance of history, Hurley’s overt references come across more as secondhand quotation than an original and vital expansion of established forms. In effect, the Suprematist ethos has become yet another historical “object,” an idealized image completely at odds with Malevich’s original intent. (Burnett Miller, 964 N. La Brea Ave., to Aug. 9.)

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