

# Creating, and enjoying, art for the sake of art

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Denzil Hurley's "Glyph-D." ( SPIKE MAFFORD)

By Matthew Kangas

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Two abstract artists exhibiting this month, Susan Dory, 40, at Winston Wächter Fine Art, and Denzil Hurley, 57, at Francine Seders Gallery, offer respectively fast and slow ways of looking at art. In the dizzying world we live in, abstract art challenges us to concentrate on shapes, forms, colors and materials for their own sake.

If this sounds escapist, you're right. Instead of social, political or ideological axes to grind, abstract artists like Dory and Hurley present a gift to the willing viewer: the pure optical pleasure of paint on canvas. No muss, no fuss, just enjoyable looking, feeling and thinking.

Hurley, a native of Barbados, West Indies, has taught at the University of Washington School of Art since 1994. A graduate of Yale University, the birthplace of minimal art, Hurley's large and small canvases all take one solid color — black, brown, orange — as a background and place series of smaller marks in rows over that.

Although this may sound simplistic, once one sees the paintings, such preconceptions are exploded. Taking months (or years) to complete, each painting consists of numerous layers of oil paint slowly built up, rubbed out or scraped down and corrected to create subtle variations of tone and hue within the solid-color surface. This gives each painting a quietly throbbing appearance that is only perceived by long and slow looking.

Revealing their riches gradually, works like "Variant-C" (2002-04), "Glyph-D" (2004-05) and "Glyph-E" (2004-05) are large, four-to-five-foot square objects that shimmer and smolder like nighttime tropical skies or piercing sunsets. The viewer is able to free-associate, but more likely, emotional moods are triggered by the deft painthandling and sensitive mark-making.

Unlike most minimal artists, Hurley's repeated marks are intuitive, randomly placed, rather than rigidly systematic. We scan the rows seeking order or plan only to be relieved by their casual placement.

The all-black "Variant-C" is a tour-de-force that echoes earlier postwar American paintings by Frank Stella and Ad Reinhardt, but adds its own sizzling contribution. The dots are a lighter blue-gray color. Equally strong, "Glyph-D" is a richly blazing orange that lights up the room.

### **Nature and consumerism**

Switching to the colder quality of acrylic paint (a plastic), Susan Dory's works are urbane and full of movement. With dozens of overlapping horizontal, colored bars, they invite a deceptively quick look. But a glance alone would be a mistake.

In her fifth solo show in Seattle since 1998, the University of Vienna-educated painter has built on the crisp, sealed-off patterns in her earlier work. Now the scale and palette are expanded and give off a sense of open air.

Spring greens and yellows, bright oranges and dark blues, as in "Familiar Sift" and "Janus" (both 2006), alternate between suggesting a rooftop garden and a row of products in a home-improvement store. This interface is the precise contemporary dimension of Dory's new art: nature mediated by consumerism.

Covering each canvas thoroughly with her network of rounded bands, Dory occasionally leaves one side open to reveal the white background. With some lines thinner and others stubbier, and some separate and not overlapping, she has attained an extraordinary variety within her preset limits.

The large rectangular paintings echo a traditional landscape format while the smaller vertical pictures act more as upright plaques or shields.

Winston Wächter will give her a solo show at its New York branch in September.



Susan Dory's "Flock" (2005), an acrylic on canvas over panel. (WINSTON W&AUML;CHTER FINE ART)

## Exhibit reviews

**"Susan Dory: Sequence Bias,"** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays through Feb. 24, Winston Wchter Fine Art, 203 Dexter Ave. N., Seattle (206-652-5855 or [www.winstonwachter.com](http://www.winstonwachter.com)).

**"Denzil Hurley : Paintings 2002-2005,"** 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 1-5 p.m. Sundays through Feb. 26, Francine Seders Gallery, 6701 Greenwood Ave. N., Seattle (206-782-0355 or [www.sedersgallery.com](http://www.sedersgallery.com)).

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