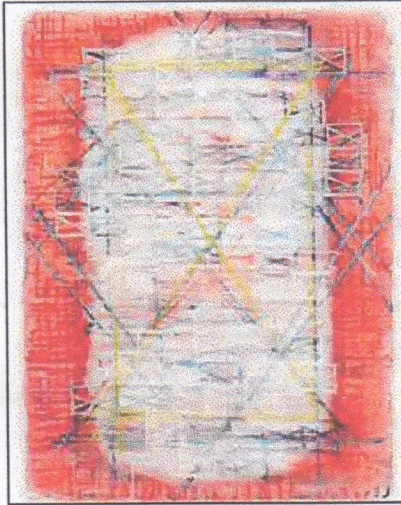


≡ ART WRAP

By John Blee
THE GEORGETOWNER

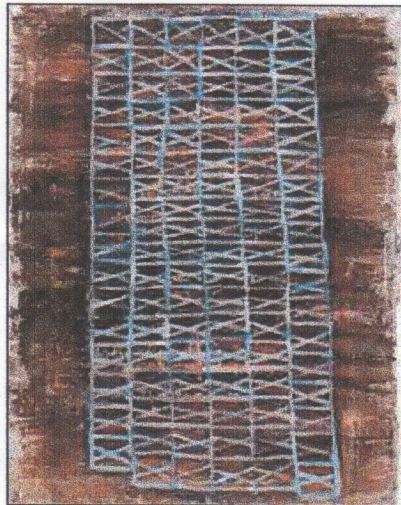
At the Troyer Gallery (1710 Connecticut Ave. NW, Tues. - Sat. 11-5, through December 21) the work of Madalyn Marcus holds forth with an assured and austere majesty that is rich in its austerity. Howard Norman, who wrote an excellent catalog essay on Marcus, suggested that she only show these pictures in the fall. He was absolutely right: they hold and amplify the season we are in.



When you approach "Body and Soul II" you feel that it is simple. However on closer scrutiny you find it to be a complex conjunction of paint strokes, drips, scrapes, sgraffito, edges of shapes, color within color (blue-in-white, white-in-red), the urge to the geometric and the urge to the organic. The shape placed, not floating (in the more-or-less-middle), relates to the ceramics background of the artist in its thing-ness, in its absolute tactility.

It is surmounted by a cross. Around it all is a winter-sky: mourning is implied. If there could be a subtitle to the show it would have to be "Northern Elegies," which is one of the late works of Akhmatova, a favorite poet of the artist.

"Elegy for Yehuda Amichai" is a formal statement of mourning, which is a field furrowed or perhaps a prayer rug. Its horizontal strokes are its punctuation. Sometimes a title can lead you away from a picture; here it leads towards it. It is worthy of this great Israeli poet.



In all of the works of Madalyn Marcus there is an internal rightness that has to do with the fact that they are not merely formal vehicles or statements about the nature of art, but are from and about the deeply felt inner nature of the artist. "Open Closed Open" quavers as if this nature opens more within. "Open" is not the first word I would use with these pictures, they are tough, but they also are yielding the more they are scrutinized.

Marcus employs a grid-like image in some of her works which in "Heliotrope" reads almost like a scaffolding. The surface of the work, as in all the works is masterful.

Over all these works there is the implied presence of the late work of Mark Rothko, and in saying that I do not mean that they are merely derivative, quite the contrary. In "Body and Soul" Marcus gives back what she has taken from Rothko and in doing so extends the tradition.

Speaking of her training in ceramics Marcus remembers students trying to ape the famous bend in the Korean tea bowls, but then she realized that it came about as a result of the drying process and that it was not merely an aesthetic decision. This realization has stuck with the artist in her desire to face head-on the task of a painter: to create work that speaks, letting the nuance come out of that process.

With the work of Marcus I am reminded of Robert Motherwell's words about David Smith: "As tough as a Mack truck and as delicate as Vivaldi."