

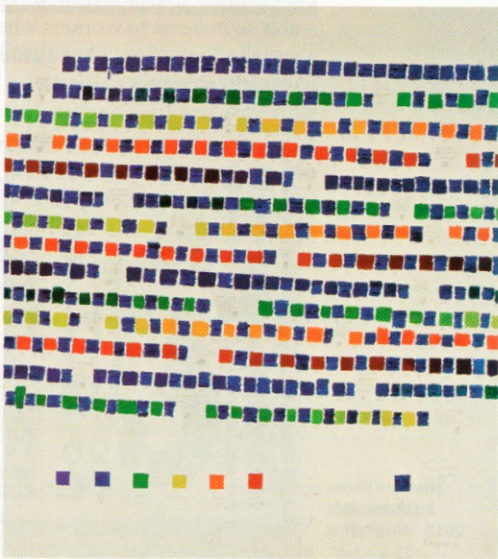
Oswaldo Romberg

HENRIQUE FARIA FINE ART

Oswaldo Romberg dedicated this exhibition to Josef Albers and Raúl Lozza, the latter of whom was a fellow Argentinean and the founder, in 1947, of Perceptismo, a derivative of Concretismo. The aim of Perceptismo, in Lozza's words, was to emphasize "the reality of the color-plane." Following in Lozza's footsteps, Romberg created a group of works in 1980 that resemble color charts—there were six such pieces in this show. Each is composed of small squares painted varying gradations of hues from Goethe's color wheel and juxtaposed with those painted some other color—ultramarine in three works and orange cadmium in the others. Romberg's presentation of the results is charmingly quirky, featuring rows of hand-drawn squares that are interrupted, at certain places, by the white space of the canvas. The works could be viewed as musical scores, with the "interacting" color serving as the musical key. Were the scores to be played, the music would sound like a Minimalist composition, with the blank spaces resembling pauses or silences between rhythmic bursts. This would obviously contrast with the more flamboyant polyphony often associated with allover gestural painting.

In other works, Romberg "deconstructs"—that is Lozza's word (I prefer to say *destroys*)—old-master paintings. Two of these "deconstructions" are on display: *1-77 of 77 Tonal Value Classif.*

Oswaldo Romberg,
*1-437 All the Colors of
the Chromatic Circle
Interacted by Blue
Ultramarine, 1980,*
acrylic and graphite
on canvas, 78 x 70".



of 77 Stripes (All of Them) from 'Madonna Di Pellegrini,' Caravaggio, 1977, and Analysis of the Tempest 'Giorgione', 1976. In the former work, the image of the Caravaggio painting is shredded, and with that the meaning of the work disappears. Romberg leaves us with fragments, all eccentrically shaped but neatly arranged in rows according to tonal value, and with a cheap reproduction of the original image situated in the work's lower-right corner. In the latter piece, the Giorgione painting is reproduced in the top center, flanked by spermatic-looking dashes of color, again neatly arranged in rows. In the lower half of the work, Romberg offers us, in handwriting, what he calls a "philogenetic" and "ontogenetic" analysis of the painting. Perhaps unwittingly, his seemingly exhaustive, peculiarly dismissive exegesis of the work makes us more curious about it. Giorgione's painting is certainly more aesthetically and cognitively engaging than Romberg's didactic reduction of it to a color chart. These two pieces clearly illustrate the familiar difference between traditional representational painting, rich with mythopoetic implications, and modernist abstract painting, sensationally colorful, but with little or no mythopoetic meaning. However reproductively degraded, the old masterpieces more than hold their own against Romberg's cool, analytic deconstruction of them.

When Romberg sticks to making abstract paintings, however, he achieves a dramatic intensity and moody power that is as emotionally resonant and intellectually complex as an old-master painting. Examples here include the three *Black Constellation* works, 2013, and *Dirty Geometry*, 2012, dynamic compositions in which variously colored stripes seem to lie on top of one another, conjuring cosmic games of pick-up sticks.

—Donald Kuspit