

Toon's Works Show Subtle, Sophisticated Touch

By DAVID PAGEL
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The new paintings by Carolee Toon at Post Gallery are considerably more sophisticated—and simpler—than any of her previous highly refined abstractions. Matter-of-factly installed, her six new works stand out as one of the most beautiful exhibitions in recent memory.

No tricks or gimmicks dress up Toon's mature works. Each consists of one, two or four square pieces of plywood, onto which the artist has painted an exquisitely textured surface of nearly microscopic precision.

Color subtly seeps out of Toon's paintings, like a delicate, almost undetectable flavor that melts on your tongue before you know it's there. Her best surfaces don't look like they've been applied with a brush but seem instead to have simply drifted onto the plywood.

"Moonglow" looks like a magnified section of the moon as it rises above the horizon on a crystal-clear night. This gorgeous painting appears to be nothing but congealed light, intangible puffs of color that float through the atmosphere.

Likewise, "Green Silk" creates the impression that it's the blend of an impenetrable chalkboard and a swath of translucent fabric rustling in the wind. "Shades," "Dust, Dusk" and "Silvery" embody the feel of mimeograph liquid, flecks of dust and softly buffed sheets of steel. Each of these finely textured, superficially Minimalist works has a powdery presence of surprising fragility. They let meaning unfold slowly, according to its own proclivities.

As another painter once said, "What you see is what you get." The difference between his abstractions and Toon's is that with hers, what you see always exceeds what you can get—especially if you believe that the experience of abstract art can be translated into words.

Profoundly open-ended—and potentially endless—Toon's paintings let viewers luxuriate in perceptions that gradually drift into consciousness. Her works flesh out a sensual territory that you can sense, even if you can't put your finger on it.

■ *Post Gallery, 1904 E. 7th Place, (213) 488-3379, through March 30. Closed Sunday through Tuesday.*