

Linda Besemer

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Linda Besemer's new paintings are very different from those made out of acrylic brush-strokes applied or otherwise attached directly to the wall through which she has, in the past few years, established herself as one of Los Angeles' most interesting artists. The new works are, like them, made entirely out of paint, but they are hung over rails, and while the earlier ones were made of combinations of gestures placed, for the most part, side by side, these present a dense surface (which is also a depth) made of overlapping grids of colour, an extreme tartan different on its back than its front, and therefore a duration as well as a simultaneity. A duration interrupted in its turn by folding or overlapping, depending on whether one is talking about the exposed back or the partially revealed front, so that one sees the final surface at the top and below it its beginning (viewed from behind, as the artist never saw it). It's as if she needed to incorporate into her practice what was excluded by necessity from her earlier work: the point of view of the wall, a vantage point distanced from the painting's face by the process which brought the painting as a whole into view for the rest of the world, a beginning irreversibly separated from its end by that which makes the latter the work's culmination.

The paintings are made in golden section proportions—one of them is called *Section d'Or*—and then folded into a square. Besemer presents the golden section in terms of a recognizable proportion and familiar measurements, three to two expressed as 72 by 48 inches—as opposed, say, to twenty-one to thirteen (74 1/2 by 45 1/2 inches), which would also be a golden section ratio—and in that four feet square is a familiar sort of size, the choice of this size adds to a conceivably unintentional reading which frames the work in order to be partially forgotten in the course of one's further engagement with the work as a whole. One's first impression is of a conflation of domestic reference, a tablecloth hung over a towel rack.

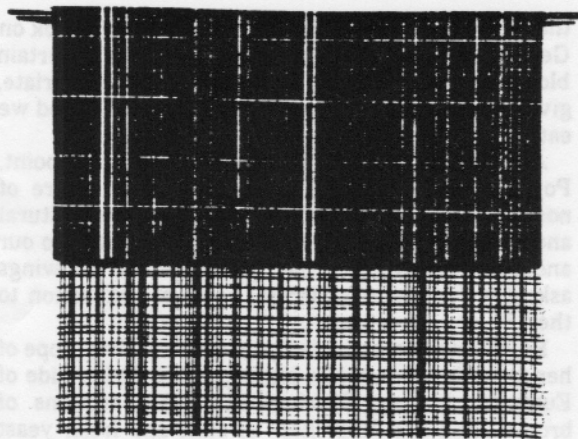
Until now, Besemer's work has pointed, almost exclusively, to art—Kenneth Noland's and Morris Louis' especially, painting made out of colour where the surface and the support are inseparable—as opposed, for example, to plastic, and

it still does. However, it seems inevitable that other kinds of references come into play once one makes something out of plastic which is not flat and on the wall, or is in some other way made into a thing as opposed to a being only a surface, as may be seen if one contrasts Besemer's new works with Ed Moses' poured and layered Rhoplex painting of 1974 (which I reviewed in *Artforum* at the time). Those, which provide a precedent within the Los Angeles painting community for Besemer's new work, but are not an influence upon it, didn't strike me, at first sight, like tablecloths. They looked instead like blankets of non-European, possibly Native American, provenance. This could indicate a generational difference that I've addressed elsewhere, having to do with to what art is meant by each ultimately to refer: where the one makes plastic refer to something that came before it, the other is happy to be continuous with a world that is now largely made out of it.

Within the bounds of their similarities of facture and format, the three works Besemer exhibited are unlike each other in ways which are hard to overlook—which means that they probably will be, certainly by the Los Angeles museums, which both treat painting with contempt, so I shall enumerate them. *Fold #7: Object Objectile* (1998) is the only one where colors visible on the back recur, in the same place, on the front. *Fold #9: Section d'Or* (1998) is overwhelmingly horizontal in orientation at the top (the front) and vertical at the bottom (on the back). *Fold #8: Baroquesque* (1998) divides into two at the top, going from deep blue at the left to light blue on the right, by way of some red and yellow, but is consistently yellow at the bottom. The latter two's final (top) surfaces, then, mark (different) transformations of the patterns with which they began, while *Object Objectile* is made of accumulation as intensification and modification, rather than as absolute change or elaboration through difference. All three involve painting's space in that to which, as spatiality, it must inevitably refer, which is time. That is what one sees when one moves beyond what they might at first resemble to what they give one to look at.

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe,
Santa Monica, California

Linda Besemer, *Fold #7: Optical Objectile*, 1998,
acrylic paint over aluminum rod, 48" x 72"
(photo courtesy of POST).



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