

## KES ZAPKUS

The infraction of formal structure which Kes Zapkus introduced in his paintings of the late 1970s is continued in this "Children of War" series. Here an asymmetric composition is narrated by disparate pictorial and colored planes to effect a metaphor for the complex memories and experiences of children subjected to war (before the age of ten, Zapkus witnessed both the German and Russian invasions of his native Lithuania). The didactic overtone of the works warrants a new designation as social abstraction, a nuclear age equivalent to the American Social Realists of the 1930s who expressed political inhumanities through painting.

In earlier works like *Firestorm* or *Mind's Eye*, our attention is blatantly commanded by the juxtaposition of intense orange, purple, green, pink, and yellow shards — simple colors which, being compelling and memorable to a child, suit Zapkus' iconography. The interlocking hues maintain the paintings' alignment to intricate human mental structuring. Among the maelstrom of color are distinct images, touchstones of memory which express the equally strong (however ironic and incongruous) stimuli of childhood pleasures and the torments of war. *Mind's Eye* includes renderings of tanks, a toy train, battleships, and spectral human forms. Sketchy superimposed lines at times resemble additional objects although, like the imperfection of memory, they never quite coalesce. Each work could be seen to represent one child, one partially clouded gestalt, but I rather interpret each painting of the series as one moment of recollection of a single experience (perhaps Zapkus' own). The incomplete images might then pulsate in and out of focus, sometimes disappearing altogether or mutating into one of the symbolic geometric shapes of solid color.

The most recent works, *Ra-*

# arts reviews

By RON WARREN

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Kes Zapkus, *Mind's Eye*, 1983. Oil on canvas, 84 x 84". Courtesy John Weber Gallery.

*tions* and *Lamentation*, resign the use of bright color in favor of analogous black, gray, and brown. Figures involved in war are assigned specific roles, and trains and airplanes no longer resemble benign toys. The increasingly world-wise thoughts of despair manifest in these paintings befit the advanced war procedures of their titles.

Given the psychological basis of Zapkus' subject, it is problematic that the compositional mass usually conforms to the rigid rectangle and surface of the canvas. Three gouache studies as well as one painting, *Spoiler* (all 1983), however, exhibit a more linear pattern, allowing untouched areas of paper or canvas, particularly in the corners and edges, to show. The subconscious aspect of the images is heightened as they float unconstrained by the support. (John Weber, *November 3-24*)

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Kes Zapkus (Weber Gallery, 142 Greene Street): From afar, Kes Zapkus's images look like large collages made from colored reproductions. But they are actually paintings designed, in the artist's words, "to project an appropriate and truthful image of the physical world as transformed by human experience." They can be sifted for their tiny components — vignettes of tanks, guns, planes, figures and so forth. But they are more satisfactory viewed as busy, all-over abstractions, most with horizontal or vertical grains and one that's a vortex to put the viewer in mind of Abraham Walkowitz's visions of New York City. (Through Nov. 24.)