

Kes Zapkus at Andre Zarre

Kes Zapkus's new paintings further refine a style he has been working on since almost the beginning of his career. Abstract, all-over, combining drawing with painting and containing hints of figuration, these canvases also address more than formal issues. The titles of two of the newest and largest works in the show, *Rivers of Rwanda* and *World Affairs/Acid Light*, indicate the breadth of his concerns.

Rivers of Rwanda, measuring 10 by 14 feet, offers an abstract, mediated vision of the heart of darkness. Its almost monochromatic surface of murky browns is splattered by streaks of black and patterned by shapes loosely outlined in yellow, red, pink, blue and green. The impression is one of a wasted, smoldering landscape seen from the air, crossed by undulating bands representing rivers. Some of the shapes suggest body parts but indirectly, the way a Rorschach test might; they still recall the horror of Rwandan rivers clogged with corpses. There are also grids that appear in various configurations; in this context they suggest a surveillance of the terrain.

Like *Rivers*, *Desire for Verdancy*

is dark and close-valued, but with a quieter, more brooding presence. It, too, is reminiscent of an aerial view, with scanner-like grids again suggesting nature menaced by civilization. In contrast, *World Affairs/Acid Light*, at 9 by 30 feet the largest as well as the most ambitious work in the show, is dominated by an expanse of high-voltage yellow with streaks and dabs of souped-up greens and oranges. These colors sizzle as if they had been laid out under a hole in the ozone layer. A jumble of sharp, irregular shapes, the painting's surface seems on the verge of exploding, its underlying grid wrenched and shattered.

The other paintings are less sociopolitical. *Ways of Work*, dominated by pale yellows, oranges, blues and greens, balances the gestural with the geometric. *Conjugation: Cotton Duck/Portrait Linen* is a diptych in teal blue with two postcard-size renderings of Cézanne's *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire* that are painted over and revised. *Midnight Reverie on Mont Sainte-Victoire* is a raucous meditation on Cézanne's advice to interpret nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone.

Despite recurrent flurries of activity, abstract painting is perpetually under fire these days. These dissonant, elliptical, emotive paintings are Zapkus's contribution to maintaining the abstract tradition. —Lilly Wei



Kes Zapkus: *World Affairs/Acid Light*, 1994-95, oil on cotton, 9 by 30 feet; at Andre Zarre.