



detail from "Hot Like Armstrong," Kes Zapkus.

### 'Kes Zapkus'

*Icehouse Gallery, 414 First Street, Greenport, (631) 477-0745. Through Aug. 28.*

For more than 30 years, Mr. Zapkus has been elaborating on the grid as both the formal framework and allusive content of his abstract paintings. Far from being a simple geometric device to anchor his compositions, the grid for him is freighted with social, political and cultural symbolism.

In this selection of recent canvases and works on paper, the vertical and horizontal structures are often disrupted by blurring, overpainting and intrusive shapes, causing a feeling of random havoc. These are clear references to aerial views of bombed cities and other damaged sites. The fact that Mr. Zapkus was forced to flee his native Lithuania during World War II, first from the Nazis and then from the Russians, inevitably invites such readings, but they are fully justified by the visual evidence.

Most of Mr. Zapkus's interpretations of destructive force are rendered in seductively softened tones and textures. The exception is "Infrared Overview," a harsh red and black abstraction that suggests a river or canal poisoned by toxic waste.

Some of the disorder may also be a result of a natural disaster, as implied in "Structures Near Water," a jumble of fragmented rectangles that may have been caused by a flood or tidal wave. The fragility of the environment and the societies that inhabit it, perpetually under threat from both humanity and nature, is Mr. Zapkus's underlying theme.

On the lighter side, he also invents visual analogies to music, a theme that translates into similarly structured images with a totally different feeling. "Hot Like Armstrong," an acrylic and gouache on paper, expresses the complexity of improvisational jazz by using the same grid framework to provide the basis for musical flights of fancy.