



Stewart Goldman, *Babe Blue*, 2001,
oil on linen, 72 x 72".

CINCINNATI

STEWART GOLDMAN

LINDA SCHWARTZ
GALLERY

Some artists seem to grow younger as they grow older. There is lilt, buoyancy, a sense of being freely unmoored in a calm sea. De Kooning had it: While time worked its debilitating damage, he soared, painting ribbons of pure color borne aloft on white fields. Mondrian, a septuagenarian émigré in Manhattan in the early '40s, fairly shivered with syncopation. Hanging out in jazz clubs bore fruit in tilted, lozenge-shaped canvases whose grids shook loose in contrapuntal patterns like

the boogie-woogie discourse in piano bars of the period. And then there's Matisse, who cut and pasted his way through *Jazz*, *The Thousand and One Nights*, and *Swimming Pool* in his final years. These artists, toes tapping, had their feet on the ground.

At the zenith of his career, Stewart Goldman has created the "Neo Jazz" paintings, 1997–2001, as refreshing as a summer in the south of France. They are his most abstract works to date but are still clearly about nature: Twigs and branches twiddle through jiggled planes of pastel corals and violets, creamy yellows and verdant greens. These are landscapes of a sumptuous fertility compressed into wavering patterns on the canvas. The zones of color, each distinct unto itself, are irregularly contoured, like lakes and streams whose borders flow in incipient and sympathetic coordination with the others. Subtle features reveal a strict infrastructure—the vertical thrust of major forms and the calculated application of gestural strokes. Despite the impression that these paintings are impulsively generated, judgment and restraint determine what we experience as an improvisational performance. In an earlier series, "Variations on Rubens," 1986–93, fauns and maidens frolic amid swirls of richly saturated colors surrounded and supported by bold checkerboards of primary and secondary hues; this antiphonal discourse is both raucous and reassuring, as nothing is out of control in a structural system that both sustains and provokes natural exuberance.

Goldman has always celebrated the square and its multiple, the grid. It is a unitary form echoing the picture plane and a principle of his pictorial linguistics. This foundation frees him to float, to be

expressive without meandering, sentimentalizing, or succumbing to illusionism. Two large walls of this show were covered with small square paintings like a compendium of Fauvist landscape details, each fragment a particle of nature seen in flickering sunlight. No two adjacent "sketches" coincided gesturally: Their strokes wiggled apart, yet all was harmonious. Never coalescing into a uniform view, the overall installation resembled a Book of Hours, demanding to be read page by page.

The highlight of the show was a six-by-six-foot painting, *Babe Blue*, 2001. The left side of the canvas is braced by a startling swath of black paint; scored by streaks of fuschia, orange, blue, and green, the form suggests a tree trunk dappled with shafts of sunlight. By inference, the luminous fields of yellow, blue, green, and violet to the right register as hills, lakes, and sky, but the predominant axis of these irregular patches is insistently upright, producing a dazzling sequence of consecutive views that read simultaneously vertically and laterally, like a well-honed riff on a classical theme. *Babe Blue* is as "neo-classical" as it is "neo-jazz" in its pictorial structure.

—Joan Seeman Robinson