

Michael Brenson

"The Gesture Painters" (Mokotoff Gallery, 735 East Ninth Street): For this observer, the most dramatic artistic encounter this month was the juxtaposition of the large abstract paintings in this exhibition with the large abstract paintings by Peter Schuyff that were on display through last Sunday at the Pat Hearn Gallery next door. Together, they suggest approaches to abstract painting that have not been reflected in the most visible galleries. Schuyff's contemplative paintings are checkered or gridlike and either spotted with light or flooded with it in a way that suggests the resurrection panel of Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece.

"The Gesture Painters" consists of two works each by five artists — Matt Baumgardner, Michael Chandler, Denise Gale, James Merrell, who organized the show, and Dan Wofford. Their work is raw. It may suggest Abstract Expressionism, tribal art or landscape imagery, but the tone is often closer to graffiti. The aim of these artists — they are friends — appears to be to build on Kline, de Kooning, Pollock and Pousette-Dart to create abstract painting wired into the current energy and savagery of New York City streets.

In the context of the show, the most effective works are by Wofford and Gale. Wofford's large, dark strokes sweep over his multicolored grounds in a kind of rage against anything measured and decorative. One clue to the underlying structure is that his almost square canvases seem to be the right size and shape. Gale's paintings are lush and bleak at the same time. Classical geometric forms fight with each other in pictorial jungles in which sweetness and order seem like traps. (Through Jan. 12.)