

Kayne Griffin Corcoran **ARTFORUM**

Primo Piano Gallery

Mary Obering divides her time between New York and Italy, and her work - which combines traditional Renaissance techniques with a rigorous formalism derived from American Minimalist art - clearly reflects her peregrinations. In her paintings Obering uses materials and methods favored during the Quattrocento, such as the use of egg tempera and gold leaf on gessoed panels. Her most recent projects, which could almost be described as sculptures, consists of boxlike rectangular wall pieces that have been painted on all visible sides. The surfaces and volumes these forms enclose have then been subdivided horizontally and vertically into monochromatic rectangles in strongly contrasting colors, which are opaque or brilliant depending on the smoothness of Obering's application of paint and gold leaf. The leaf is distributed unequally, and it appears even more uneven because of the oxidation that inevitably occurs, adding an element of chance - as well as a subtle sensuality - that counterbalances the work's formal rigor.

The visual impact of Obering's work is considerable. The viewer must simultaneously register her anachronistic materials and her use of a grid to frame and structure each image. The hieratic and precious aspect of the gold leaf is lifted from its usual context, and placed in a new one, in which something indefinably different seems to be suggested than was indicated by the use of this material during the Renaissance. There is a hierarchical relationship between the gilded and colored portions of Obering's pieces, but the works also tend to engage the entire exhibition space.

The elements that comprise the individual pieces, along with their chromatic juxtapositions, yield a sculptural relief that is relatively uniform at times and at other times displays an undulating, marble like effect. Although they are formed of rectangles, Obering's paintings suggest contemporary tondos, and, through her process of reduction and synthesis, each "tondo" itself seems to stand in for a single, ideal image. The spectator experiences an intense pleasure that results from a commingling of ethereal and physical aspects, the spirituality of religious icons with the almost body like physicality that results from the icon's extension into the three-dimensional world.

—Mario Condognato