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# Forget the Rothko Chapel and Meditate in Front of David Simpson's Calming, Intense Paintings

By Meredith Deliso

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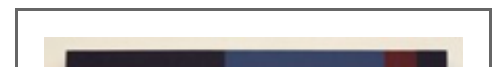
"Red Feathers" (left) and "Violet Black Pearl" by David Simpson

The early works in David Simpson's new show at Gallery Sonja Roesch were made in 1982. Though for an artist who has been painting since the late 1950s, "early" in this case is relative.

At 82 years old, the San Francisco artist is a contemporary of stalwarts like Ellsworth Kelly and Jasper Johns, coming out of the wake

of abstract expressionism. He still paints every day, though now churns out big rectangles of iridescent colors. The works in the exhibition, his third at the Midtown gallery in seven years, show an evolution from his more geometric abstraction pieces to these color studies -- like a mini-retrospective of the latter half of his career.

The two earlier pieces here -- *Five Square Rotation #1* and *Five*

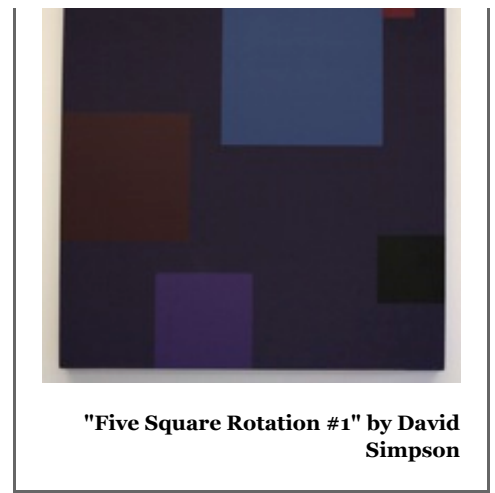


*Square Rotation #2* -- are as similar as their names suggest. They're both comprised of squares of the same sizes and placement, though are filled with different colors from one painting to the next. Painted 30 years ago, they even feel like relics from an earlier time, serious studies concerned with lines and dimension, especially when seen with Simpson's later work.

The artist's pieces since then seem almost opulent in comparison -- they're glowing, rich squares of gold, green and violet. They have an intensity about them, a quiet swirling in the strokes used, though oddly calming. You could easily feel compelled to pop a squat in front of them as if you were at the Rothko Chapel and meditate. Though these paintings are best viewed on your feet, shifting from side to side to see how the light plays with the color -- iridescent interference pigments mixed with acrylic paint -- and shifts it. They are always changing.

The colors used here are refreshingly unexpected -- they're near-pastels -- and quite stunning, especially in their pairings. The best is between *Red Feathers* and *Violet Black Pearl*. One is a rusty gold, the other almost black. They are painted three years apart, but complement each other well, bringing out the darker or lighter shades in their neighbor. There's a definite conversation going on here.

*David Simpson at Gallery Sonja Roesch, 2309 Caroline Street, runs now through December 29. For more information, call 713-659-5424 or visit [www.gallerysonjaroesch.com](http://www.gallerysonjaroesch.com).*



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