

## **Terrell James** by Walter Hopps

In the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties, an extraordinary new wave of abstract artists were practicing on both coasts. Their art mostly has been known as abstract expressionism. Giant figures in New York included Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and David Smith. In San Francisco there was Clyfford Still and the younger painter Sam Francis. A tradition of abstract ceramics began with Peter Volkous.

Since 1960, this gestural abstraction has emerged as a strong tradition, continuing to the present day alongside such relatively new developments (in America) as assemblage, pop, and conceptual art. The two finest gestural abstract artists working today in Texas, and among the best in the country, are Virgil Grotfeldt and Terrell James. In James' current work, she has mastered a lyric freedom usually seen in watercolor, rather than in oil. Although articulated line is often structurally important, the paintings are primarily built of patches and fluid areas of color. Particularly in the smaller Field Studies, James, like Francis, demonstrates a superb instinct for grounding a work in the sheer, open potential of white paint.

It was Jackson Pollock, in the classic poured abstractions, who produced his generation's most beautiful and profound evocations of nature. The younger Californian Richard Diebenkorn also called it forth in his own abstract expressionist paintings. Working out-of-doors in far west Texas, and from sketchbooks of regular trips through the monumental Trans-Pecos, James reconstructs vision and gesture in conveying what she sees and feels in the landscape. With larger canvases, and in works on paper such as the Davis Mountains drawings and large monoprints from the Gaea and Tellus series, she calls forth the scope and depth of nature in a painterly performance of its rhythms and forms.

This exhibition's most recent painting, Sentry, brings this approach and its sensibility to the arena of the body. With a new, arching structure, it introduces a personal scale of meanings and references. The work shown here represents her emergence into this more intimate space, one carefully tended and more edited, yet still open, suffused with light.