

Under cover in the abstract

Four new abstract paintings by **Eric Niebuhr** exploit the abstraction of camouflage in a provocative — and suitably crafty — way. If the individual works in his second solo show at Mary Goldman Gallery don't quite add up, collectively they're in stimulat-

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ART

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AROUND THE GALLERIES

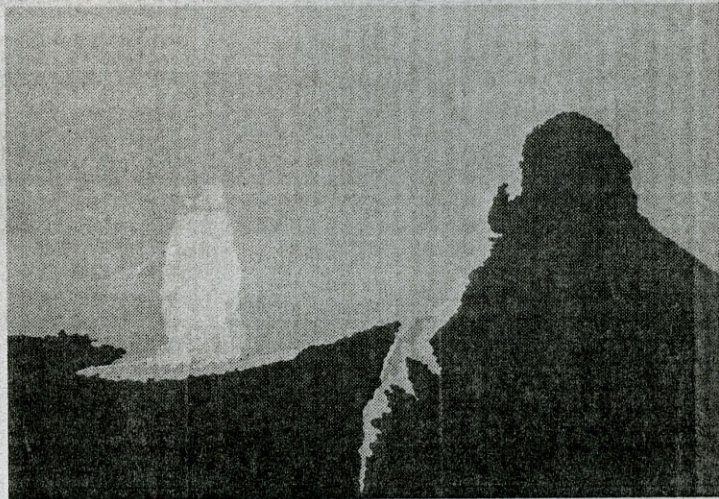
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ing territory.

Camouflage is an illusionist's survival trick, a way of disappearing into a hostile environment. The institutionalized hostility toward painting, especially abstract painting, may have lessened dramatically in the art world over the last decade, but bad habits are hard to shake. Niebuhr turns the disappearing act around, using aspects of camouflage to stand out in plain view.

Niebuhr's dappled patterns don't mimic camouflage so much as obliquely suggest it. Onto smoothly painted fields of solid color he brushes vaporous, atmospheric patches, which open up an illusion of deep space. He also pours thick areas of paint, which read as positive forms in negative space. The palette is most often muted — taupe, violet, khaki green, periwinkle.

There are no discernible people, places or things in any of these works, which a gallery handout says were inspired by scenes from movies. But, like differentiated protoplasm, they seem to contain the possibility for transformation and growth — as if people, places or things might come into view if you look hard enough. They feel subterranean, like secrets lying in wait.

Mary Goldman Gallery, 932 Chung King Road, Chinatown, (213) 617-8217, through Oct. 11. Closed Sunday through Tuesday.



ERIC NIEBUHR: *Figures are suggested but don't quite take shape in the painter's four new abstractions.*