

Art in America

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Suzanne Garrison and Nicholas Howey at Cristinerose

This two-person exhibition featured paintings by Suzanne Garrison in one room, and those by Nicholas Howey in another.

Although their works are quite disparate, a number of thematic and conceptual confluences exist between the two. For example, each artist has created a rather shallow, brightly lit abstract space that remains constant from painting to painting. Within this space, they each manipulate signs and symbols which seem to refer to personalized iconographic systems.

Howey, who has been showing in New York since the early '80s, has developed a kind of private alphabet. Using only his hands, he paints fields of rich, saturated color, which serve as backdrops for simple but enigmatic central glyphlike markings. These signs, in each of the five large (approximately 6-by-4-foot) canvases he presented in this show, are thickly painted in colors that contrast sharply with the backgrounds.

In *Frieze*, bold white lines describe an odd geometric form that looks like a misshapen home plate in a baseball field. A thin blue "X" crosses the white form and sets the entire cipher vibrating against a brilliant orange background. *Misspelling*, a work whose title perhaps teasingly equates painting with writing, is similarly theatrical. It



Suzanne Garrison: #15 from the "Cerebra-Architec-Tonic" series, 1995, oil on canvas, 60 inches square; at Cristinerose.

features a white diamond shape and a smaller form like an infinity symbol, which appear to hover at eye level in front of a fire-engine-red curtain. While the emblematic images imply urgent portent, like road signs of some futuristic civilization, they stubbornly defy translation.

Howey's paintings stay within a purely abstract language, but work by Garrison, an artist from California, adds a cast of illusionistically rendered objects to an abstract space. Collectively titled the "Cerebra-Architec-Tonic" series, the six large and medium-sized canvases on view in her first major New York show present gridded spaces that resemble electronic circuitry. Some of the items, ranging from mountains to fried eggs, are more identifiable than others. In #4, we find key chains, dice and gloves, and in #5, eggs and corn on the cob. Although these objects are rendered as accurately as textbook illustrations, their relative sizes are often disproportionate. A human hand looms large in the foreground of

#11, while the bathtub in the upper right is the same size. An I.V. bag floats at the upper left of #14, while three equally large surgical gloves fly about the edges of the space. In all of the works, these elements are arranged in patterns that suggest dizzying movements. Each seems to swirl around in a different but equally frenzied pattern.

Garrison's work implies visual puzzles, but the artist provides no solutions. The fragmented imagery may represent favorite childhood memories, or it could be an imaginative attempt to describe scientific theories. One searches for more clues to unravel these agitated scenarios. But maybe that's Garrison's point; she seems to endeavor to keep them in a constant state of flux.

—David Ebony

Nicholas Howey: *Misspelling*, 1995, acrylic on canvas, 67 by 51 inches; at Cristinerose.

