

ARTFORUM



William Schwedler, *For Pursuit*, 1980, acrylic on plywood, 12 x 46"

William Schwedler | The Clocktower By Richard Flood

William Schwedler's recent paintings are done on plywood, molded into large S-shapes, or, at their simplest, into convex and concave arcs. Hung horizontally, their streamlined curves hug the wall as a good set of tires hugs the road. Indeed, there is much about the work that evokes classic automobile-ad copy: phrases such as "aerodynamic styling" feel absolutely right applied to Schwedler's visual concerns, which manage, like the cars the copy describes, to look brand new while remaining comfortably traditional. Schwedler's paintings are unquestionably abstract. They are also undeniably metropolitan; his composition has a jazzy tensile rhythm that could serve as a visual analogue for a good bebop riff. The gessoed and painted surfaces are activated by a highway system of charcoal webs that pull together discrete areas of collage. Recurrent decorative rest stops include affectionately *recherché* pieces of patterned linoleum, banded arrangements of matchbook covers stamped with an elementary portrait of Jack Kennedy, and drink vouchers with the logo of the Anvil bar. Other less culturally specific leitmotifs—a toothbrush-shaped wood relief and a wood-grain pattern echoing out from a central whorl—are overlaid with a clear acrylic glaze to achieve an effect not unlike a beveled windscreen. Lest it all sound hyperkinetic, it should be stressed that, to relax the composition, Schwedler uses a smoky palette of colors which, from a distance, belie the frenetic surface.

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Gorgeously installed along the room's cornice and on a stepped display pyramid, the Roseville pieces could have been dangerously competitive (their dusty colors and extravagant organic motifs are unique in American consumer pottery). But, to the credit of the work, the Rosevilles simply contributed to an installation strategy that converted the Clocktower into a pavilion for a whimsically informative cultural exchange.

—Richard Flood