

Art in America

September 2006

Review of Exhibitions

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New York, Portland, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Santa Monica, Santa Clara, Montreal, Sao Paulo, London, Oxford, Barcelona, Berlin, Augsburg, Istanbul

SANTA CLARA

Julius Hatofsky at the Triton Museum of Art

Julius Hatofsky (1922-2006) had a long career that received little critical attention. He began painting in New York during the 1950s and moved to San Francisco in 1961 to teach at the San Francisco Art Institute, eventually retiring in 2001. During the 1960s, he worked in a Bay Area Abstract-Expressionist mode, creating sumptuous, almost iridescent surfaces animated by streams of sinuous energy. After 1973, his paintings gradually moved toward a symbolist-inspired figuration influenced by William Blake, Odilon Redon and Albert Pinkham Ryder. These works often feature obscure, scurrying phantoms painted in a frothy multihued and multilayered oil impasto. But whether they were created in an Abstract-Expressionist or semi-abstract symbolist manner, Hatofsky's paintings are sensually generous and richly nuanced.

This exhibition focused on the last four decades of Hatofsky's

career. It closed on Jan. 1, the day the 83-year-old artist passed away. The show contained two modestly scaled untitled works from the 1960s, but the majority of the 30 oils on canvas and acrylics on paper were created after 1978, emphasizing Hatofsky's abstract-symbolist period. A particularly stunning example is the large *Dream Fragments with Columns* (1984), in which vivid warm reds are balanced by cool greens and violets that capture the eerie, evanescent light that precedes sunrise. In the foreground of this windswept landscape, what appears to be an open tomb shelters a slumbering, intertwined clutch of human figures, oblivious to the turbulent world that surrounds them.

About half the works in this exhibition were keyed in brilliant and boisterous hues, while the rest embraced a nocturnal palette of deep violets and viridians that demonstrated Hatofsky's ability to find chromatic surprises in shadowy tonalities. This was especially apparent in a stupendous, irregularly shaped three-panel work measuring 10 by 33 feet (*Untitled*, 1968-89), which the artist repeatedly returned to for more than two decades. In it we see several groups of figures struggling to extricate themselves from dark recesses, as if to ascend a symbolic mountain of ebullient, glistening color at the center of the epic composition. A compendium of the artist's style and imagery—a kind of Achilles shield offering a vision of what life is and should be—it is an engagingly complex work with a totemic feel.

—Mark Van Proyen

Julius Hatofsky: *Untitled*, 1968-89, oil on canvas, 10 by 33 feet; at Triton Museum of Art.

