

Art in America

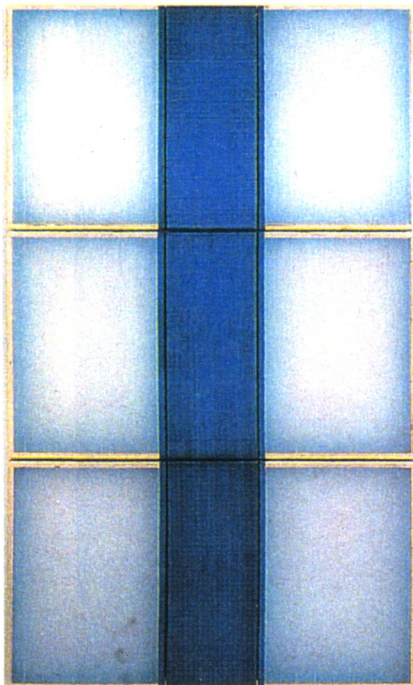
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Heather Hutchison at Nohra Haime

Heather Hutchison's paintings are made of wax on Plexiglas panels which are mounted on birch stretchers. The wax is sometimes used au naturel; at other times, Hutchison tints it with pigment. The 3½-inch depth of the stretchers makes them function as reverse shadow boxes of a sort. Hutchison paints the inside edges of her stretchers with dark colors which are faintly visible through the wax. The sense of color masked and yet transmitted by the overlying wax layer is the source of the exhibition's title: "Translucid Passages."

Hutchison generally uses her boxes as modules to form larger units, from triptychs to 9- or 12-part paintings. They may at first glance remind the viewer of the works of Minimalists such as Donald Judd. But Hutchison's medium is inherently sloppy, with the wax dripping beyond the painting's surface and onto the outside edges of the stretcher. Caulking of nail holes is undisguised, and the knotholes of the stretcher's wood peek through the Plexiglas.

Within her reductive format, Hutchison achieves much varia-



Heather Hutchison: *Nine High*, 1993, mixed mediums, 91 by 54½ by 3½ inches; at Nohra Haime.

tion. The uniform brushstrokes are horizontal in some works, vertical in others. Occasionally she paints a layer of brushstrokes running in one direction and then adds another layer on top of it with those strokes running perpendicular to the first. Given the translucence of the wax, the first layer remains visible, creating a ghostly grid. In some works the artist subverts the grid by painting passages in a swirling pattern.

Such passages are confined to the central units of Hutchison's paintings, as are the areas of surface color. Hers is not an all-over esthetic, but one that seeks the center. While some of her titles refer to structural characteristics—*Nine High*, or *Division I*, for example—others such as *Resurrection* or *For All the People Who Have Died* attest to religious or metaphysical concerns. —Reagan Upshaw

