

Betty Parsons

A.M. SACHS GALLERY

The work of Betty Parsons at Sachs shows the virtuosity of an experienced painter as well as the awkwardness of someone attempting to sidestep existing conventions for the discovery of basic forms. The paintings often refer indirectly to landscape or figure. *The Queen of Crete*, for example, is vertical and suggestive of the human body, somewhat similar to the forms of Pollock in his early painting. One of the most successful paintings in the show is *To the Glory of Africa* in which loosely executed red lines against a field of light blue and tan are set into motion by a counterpoint of small blue squares. In several of the paintings, however, the sophistication of accepted ways of handling shape, color, and material, creates a conflict between the mastery of execution and the desire to approach more primitive forms.

In the wood reliefs, Parsons has been able to reject conventions of sculpture for the invention of archetypical forms and images. Blocks, chips, and sticks of wood are nailed together and striped with color, forming totemlike figures, referents to a reality we recognize in barest form but fill out immediately in our minds. Similar to stick figures, the wood pieces take on full flesh from our experience in the world. The constructions demonstrate a profound visual acuity, for Parsons is able to show how slight variations of form can change a personality, create a sense of the humorous, or convey particular moods.

—Lizzie Borden