

Philadelphia

Jack Tworikov

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Jack Tworikov's is an exemplary body of work, the product of a lifelong devotion to painting. This exhibition was the first retrospective to survey Tworikov's entire career of more than 50 years. It began with Tworikov's early Cézannesque still lifes and figures, and traced his painstaking, often painful progression toward Abstract Expressionism, and his subsequent dissatisfaction with what he called its "enforced spontaneity"; and it articulated how this led to the development of his mature abstract style, with its signature meld of geometry and gesture.

Despite his associations with the New York School—and a lifetime of teaching and contact with younger artists—Tworikov pursued, with high integrity, a deliberately difficult and rather solitary path in his art. He was driven by a constant impulse to examine and question, and still admitted to doubt and anxiety in the last decade of his career. (Tworikov was born in 1900 and died in 1982.) He was not one of the great innovators like Willem de Kooning or Franz Kline, with whom he was closely linked during the glory years of Abstract Expressionism; and his work of that period, while intelligent and accomplished, looks somehow clotted and congested, overshadowed by some of his colleagues' greater achievements. Even his work from well into the '60s seems somehow preparatory. One of the chief virtues of this exhibition was its close reading of his tenacious struggle as he methodically worked his way, during the latter part of the '60s, to a style uniquely appropriate to his analytic yet spiritual temperament.

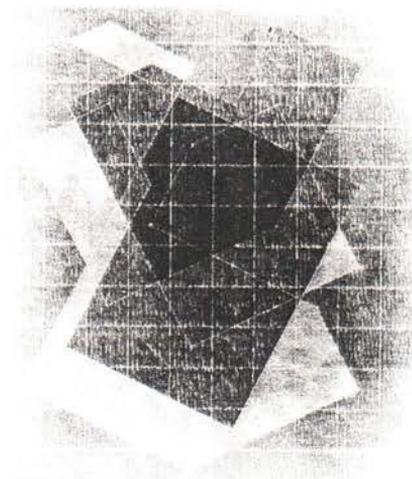
Tworikov's cerebral nature necessitated a transformation of the hot approach of the action painter into a cooler, more contemplative study where the intellect guided yet paradoxically freed feeling. The mature work's incorporation of an underlying armature of drawing based on intellectual (usually mathematical) concepts allowed Tworikov to retain and yet discipline the calligraphic gesturalism of his earlier work, activating the ground of the canvas through a rhythmic stroking that approaches an almost Zen-like mechanism of realization. This compulsive "touch" as it intersects with a

highly personalized approach to color is where the emotional intensity is located and held in Tworikov's paintings. Within his later style he also explored variations on different formal issues of abstraction, particularly the division of the canvas into geometric parts that reconfigure yet relate to the whole, and the suggestion of spatial depth that maintains the two-dimensional integrity of the picture plane. Also visible in the later work is evidence of Tworikov's interaction with and exposure to various new artistic ideas, which he always assimilated to his own purposes. For example, some of the stratagems he devised for structuring his paintings, such as dividing the canvas into the number of squares on a chessboard and plotting the drawing according to the moves a knight can make, relate quite closely to the methodology of much Conceptual art, although the paintings were never subsumed to the idea. These paintings look especially interesting now in the context of the current attention to abstraction. This is ironic, as Tworikov was as far removed from the concerns of fashion as any artist could be.

The works of the late '70s and '80s seem to me to have attained to some higher sphere where they breathe a palpable light and air, approaching, despite their complex compositions, a heroic breadth and a kind of transcendence. It is a plane of achievement all the more worthy because one was made aware throughout this exhibition of the degree of difficulty with which Tworikov continually set himself to contend, and the demanding personal stan-

dards by which he tested himself and his art as he pursued "justness" in painting. It was a moving experience to confront such ethical force in the work of a lifetime.

—PAULA MARINCOLA



Jack Tworikov, *Knight Series VI*, 1976, oil on canvas, 90 x 75".