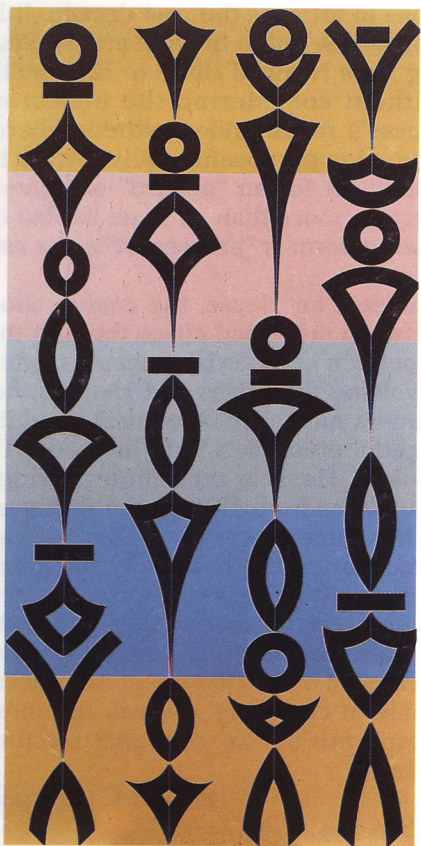


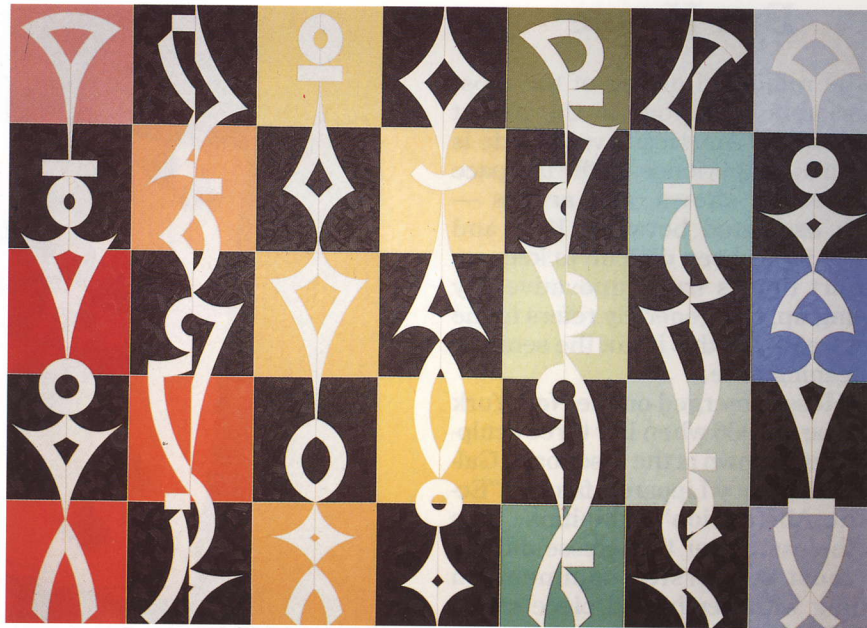
Valerie Jaudon

Applying a will-to-figure may well be Valerie Jaudon's most characteristic stance. Surely in her most recent body of work it is the most conspicuous mode of approach. Where once had been a complex, diagrammatic interlace, are now to be found checkerboards or stripes against which run abstract figures compiled of an assortment of geometric parts. Cobbled together yet rigid all the same, these figures present their iron-clad caprice to us as self-evident. In doing this, Jaudon gives an interesting twist to the current late-modern obsession with canonical form.

In the hands of some artists, eighteenth-century capriccios tested the possibilities of a certain sort of fanciful world. Motivated by a wish to improvise yet constrained by predetermined stylistic norms, François Boucher and others contrived fictional structures of a rationalized sort of chinoiserie to decorate the virtual space of paintings as well as to ornament the actual space of rooms. Using fancy in a rational way allowed ornament to germinate into full-blown decoration.



Valerie Jaudon, *Algebra*, 1992, oil on canvas, 100x50 in.



Valerie Jaudon, *Concordance*, 1992, oil on canvas, 90x126 in.

In her current phase, Jaudon proposes to manipulate certain given modernist structures as though they were motifs. Stacking the motifs produces spindles that become figures; superimposing motifs produces (by default) figure and ground in a humorously dissociated relationship. The ground being colored in an erratic array proposes itself as painting against which the figures play out a kind of drawing.

Proposing modernist structure as motif readies modernism for parody. For what once had shown itself as a formalist principle governing a whole is rendered intellectually portable. Through miniaturization and through ornamental application, the circles, ovals, or the sections thereof, reveal themselves as manipulable features within a decorative scheme rather than as necessary elements in a putative formal logic. The capriccios that result from coupling and uncoupling geometric elements to create ornamental figures create an amusing chinoiserie at modernism's expense. Treating heavy themes light-heartedly was not only a pleasure of the rococo; it is a practice born of an attitude that comes around with cyclic regularity as philosophic commitment wanes: style becoming stylization in a jiffy.

Whereas Philip Taaffe has at times entertained manipulation of modernism as style, Jaudon displays a sly vocabulary of type — a typological dis-

play potentially freakish in implication. Occasionally asymmetry distorts the presumed regularity of organization to produce rhythmic coincidences as wacky as they are serendipitous. The more the viewer scrutinizes what is at hand, the more curiosities emerge from these seemingly normative decorative patterns.

Valerie Jaudon is staking her claim on the Postmodern Picturesque. Reducing modernist structure to motif as postmodern architects do; applying these motifs as appearance, as facade; combining these, less to court invention than to allude to convention: Jaudon has joined an ever more populous group of artists seeking an aestheticism appropriate to the fin de siècle of our time. Her version of this postmodern picturesque is a decor cognizant of its distance from the rigors of high modern decoration, yet unlike past recurrences of picturesque-ness, hers is not saturated in mood, associationist and dreamy. As expression, Jaudon's paintings do not implicate visionary form. They are content to realize a picturesqueness in pragmatic and formalist practice, with neither nostalgic nor futurist nuance. With neither nostalgic nor futurist menace, Jaudon's decorative stance places value on neutrality toward the historicism of its own moment.

Marjorie Welsh

At Sidney Janis Gallery, New York