

Robert Sagerman at Marcia Wood Gallery

By Sara Riff



Robert Sagerman, Openings at Marcia Wood Gallery, September 12 - October 19, 2013.
Image courtesy Marcia Wood Gallery.

For the past 20 years, Robert Sagerman has been making paintings inspired by the concept of the Shekinah, or “Divine Presence,” from Jewish mysticism. Sagerman’s Openings exhibition, on view at Marcia Wood Gallery through October 19, is a continuation of his ongoing spiritual study. Sagerman has M.A. degrees in painting, art history, and religious studies, as well as a Ph.D. in Hebrew and Judaic Studies, and his knowledge and devotion to these fields truly shine through in every piece selected for the show. He creates all of his color field paintings by mixing his own blend of oil paint and layering thick drops on top of each other. Sagerman tallies each drop as he works. This process is based on the actions of Jewish mystics who meditated through counting, as Sagerman considers his work to be a devotional



practice: capturing the perpetually shifting, immaterial Shekinah at a moment in time and displaying it in a visual medium. The finished product is always unique. While all the pieces were captivating, one standout was Untitled (black), and it summed up the experience of seeing Sagerman’s work in person—not just on a computer screen. When first seen from a few feet away, Untitled appeared a bit boring next to its more colorful companions. Upon closer inspection, however, a new image began to unfold: It is made up of multiple mixes of black paint, some with a blue, green, brown or silver tint, a polished or muted finish; and others a pure black with flecks of bronze shining through. The texture of the dabs of paint gave the work a sculptural appeal, prompting the viewer to go from one edge to the other, hopping, ducking, and observing from every possible angle. Rivers, canyons, towers of blackness appear, and tiny islands of pure white canvas peek from beneath, all in a single painting.

These nuanced pieces are hypnotizing, and they allow viewers to peer into the indiscernible world of the Shekinah. Openings is for anyone looking for a thoughtful and spiritual event, or who is simply interested in the process of creating artwork.

Sara Riff is a contributing author for Burnaway.