

# Alden Mason's Puzzling, Satisfying Pain

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**A**LDEN MASON shook the tree of Abstract Expressionisms until he found a style he could work with. You know where the style comes from, in a way, yet the work is so wholly individual, Mason and alive that the paintings leave you puzzled.

There is nothing hard about Mason's current work at Polly Friedlander Gallery (through Oct. 21), nor is there anything especially cool. Instead, the art seeks its own avenues of expression through warmth, brightly lit colors, a pulsating life that oozes out across the canvas and toward the viewer.

Mason's work represents technical achievements which people have commented on before. We needn't bother now. But what is a constant in these works is their shared dynamism. It is as if it flows from one canvas to the next. This quality of energy is probably the most important thing that Mason inherited from Abstract Expressionism. Yet, as do all artistic heirs, he changes and alters the original gift for his own purposes.

The style of the show represents maturity for this Northwest painter. It is one which has been slow in coming as Mason sampled other art ideas, touching on a fashion here and there without every fully submitting to an exterior notion. However, now the work has arrived. It is of an artist who is in full control of his faculties and one who has created an unique artistic profile: a profile which continues the tradition of painting and extends into new areas of exploration and excitement.

It is as if Mason has gone right to the source of life: nature. His forms, cellular, crowd one another on the canvas competing for attention and space yet somehow fitting together into a cohesive whole. There is tension, yes, struggle, yes; but the result is not chaos but a reining in of all the competing elements, harnessing them and making them work together instead of in opposition.

Much of modern art is austere, a self-imposed limitation on one's creative energies. Mason's work is not so. He takes whatever he can from his colors, his forms, his energy-level and applies it to the work. The result is work which vibrates with life, rich in its own devices, more than capable of meeting life on its own terms.



'Giggle Squeezer,' an oil pastel by Alden Mason in the Polly Friedlander Gallery.