



September 2010



Richard Diebenkorn

Greenberg Van Doren and Leslie Feely Fine Art

These two shows of paintings and works on paper focused on Richard Diebenkorn's early work, from 1949 to 1955. Diebenkorn moved from California to Albuquerque in 1949, and to Illinois in 1952, before settling a year later in Berkeley. Because the artist's abstract paintings usually bear the name of the place where he worked, his itinerary seems to matter. There are desert colors and forms in his Albuquerque work and what resemble urban hillsides, streets, and vegetation in the Bay Area paintings.

At the stunningly mounted Leslie Feely exhibition, Diebenkorn's work was presented "in context," alongside that of kindred artists, although, in some ways, that was unnecessary. The work itself shows those associations, whether in Diebenkorn's channeling of influences like Bonnard, in his black-and-white drawings, or in his calligraphic presaging of Brice Marden's "Cold Mountain" series. Among peers, Joan Mitchell's early work (not on display here) is also suggested in these pieces, as she, too, played with linearity and large planes of color. More singularly, Diebenkorn's characteristic use of black edges to almost carve out areas of color could be seen here in formation.

Both shows contained gems never previously exhibited. At Greenberg Van Doren, these included small pieces featuring planar areas in colors ranging from rich greens, in an untitled work from 1953-55, to deep oranges and brown, in a 1951 work, as well as larger paintings such as *Albuquerque # 7* (1951). At Leslie Feely, three small works on paper, including two bright gouaches and a black-and-white drawing, simply sang together. There was also a cartoonish gouache from 1952, hinting at the artist's representations of clubs and spades, which he indulged in long after passing through figuration and then returning to abstraction. He had already allowed himself to start playing. **CYNTHIA NADELMAN**