

REVIEWS:

GUIDO MOLINARI

Yajima/Galerie

May 5-29, 1976

RENÉ FAVANT

Translated by Michael Greenwood

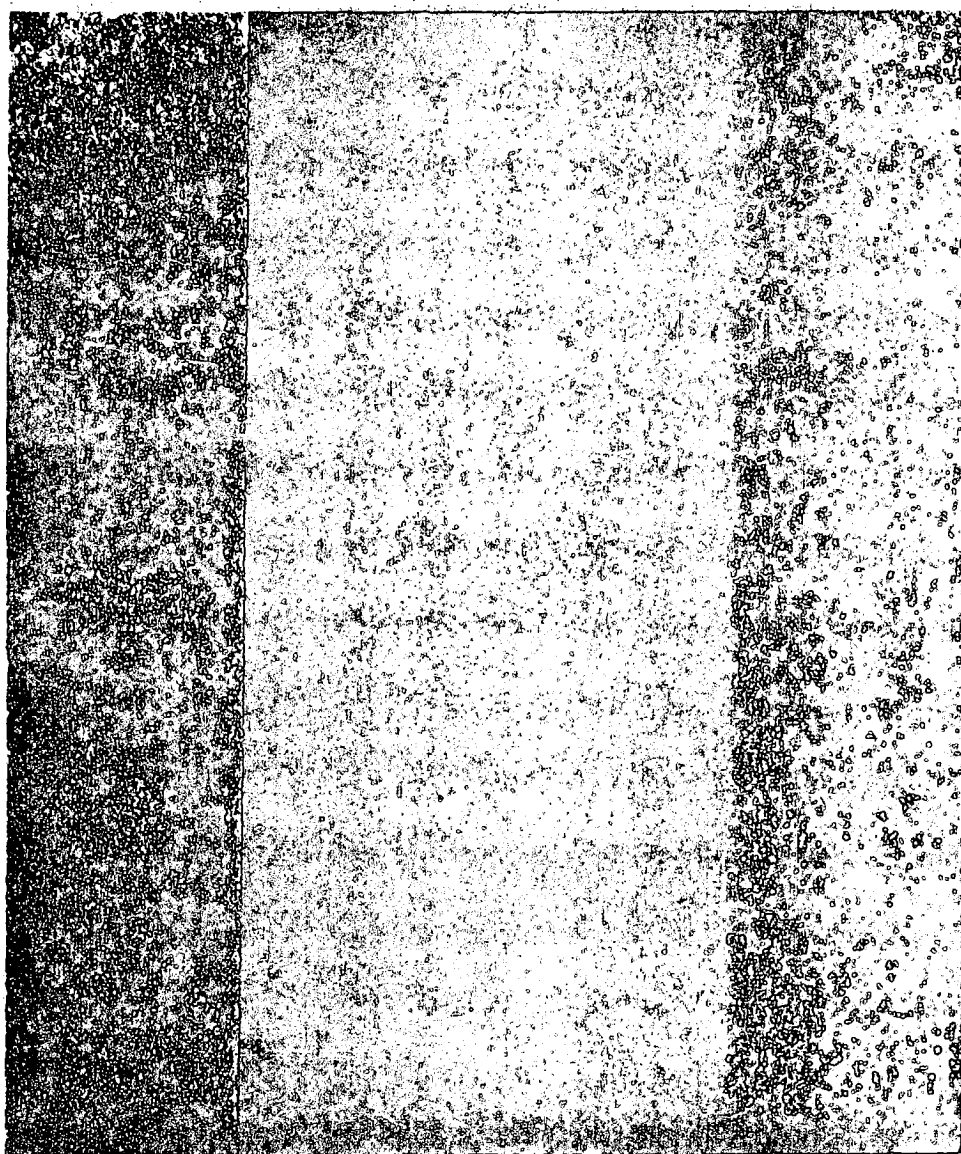
The diminutive Yajima/Galerie offers us a great exhibition: five recent paintings from 1976 in which Molinari again reveals his own particular strength and boldness. Tireless in both theory and practice, Molinari once again tackles the problem of form and color, and their interrelationship, by means of the pictorial device that has almost become his signature: vertical stripes in juxtaposition. But what in other artists may become a personal convention or mere repetitiousness, in the case of Molinari is the sign of a deeply reflective nature steadily building on basic principles. Here, all the former methods of organizing his paintings have changed radically but in ways so subtle as to escape the attention of any but the most observant viewer bent on discovering the fascination of these apparently simple and straightforward works.

The forceful color, increasingly daring and refined in its subtle variations and tonalities, above all commands the viewer's attention (a reversal of the prime role of form in his work). Whether muted or declamatory, the colors are composed either in harmonies (*Orange and Brun-beige*) or in contrasts (*Vert-brun, Rose and Brun-violet*), sometimes opposing warm and cold, or primary and secondary, but never with total consistency, which is why it is difficult to single out any painting entirely innocent of ambiguity and contradiction.

For, with Molinari, color is felt rather than calculated. It proceeds not from the realm of intellect but from perception and sensibility. Though the style may be severe (flat color and hard-edge), the effect is that of an Expressionist painting. Color is the vital force that gives the work its immediate impact and leaves a deep impression on the viewer's consciousness.

But purely sensory response to color is followed up by a more intellectual awareness of underlying structure: the revelation of a distinct new direction in these latest works. If in the earlier works color played the part of a variable in an invariable form (stripes, for example, and checker board patterns) and constituted the "meaning" in terms of permutations and rhythms, here it seems to determine the interaction of form itself. Molinari replaces the modular syntax of the works before 1973 with a more complex "organism." In this latest development, therefore, we discover what lay behind the oblique stripes that were so startling in the works after 1974: a definite willfulness of composition and a boldly demonstrative approach to pictorial structure that even reinstates drawing itself.

Molinari has reduced the number of stripes, here never more than four, in the interests of a better formal economy. The very slight widening of the stripe (a few centimetres) toward either the bottom or the top creates an asymmetrical division. The stripe asserts its verticality even by the very fact of its irregular dimensions. Thus the



GUIDO MOLINARI

Vert-Brun, 1976

acrylics, 82" x 69"

Photo: Gabor Szilasi, courtesy Yajima/Galerie

task of "formalization" through color appears as the be-all and end-all of the stripe, the *raison d'être*, its goal as well as its point of departure, defined by contrast and difference. And so we are made aware of the vertical nature of the composition which, because the proliferation of stripes and interplay of colors (left-right-left) tended to stress their horizontality, passed unnoticed in the earlier paintings. The stripes' function, as determined by their upright position, is to stabilize the whole field of colors rather than to create an effect of jumpiness with the clash of neighboring hues. Whereas before a color would be deliberately assertive, it is now something stable and concrete, all the more so since the elements of gravity and mass reappear in the shape and line of the present works.

Thus the viewer is led to scan the painting as a whole in search of variations and analogies, and

to discover that it is a space punctuated at regular intervals by denser passages of color and form. This is the almost imperceptible structure that establishes the colors securely on the flat plane of the surface. The shape, inversely related to that of its neighbor, draws the separate colors together into a single configuration and ensures the optical flatness of the entire painting (as exemplified in the schemata of *Vert-brun, Rose and Brun-beige* where the oblique correspondences are stressed in order to bring out the directional emphasis).

These brief observations cannot begin to do justice to the full richness of Molinari's latest paintings but may perhaps serve to give some account of the artist's new concerns and to place them both in the context of and as a breaking away from the main body of work brought together in the retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada.