

# FREED

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## DOUGLAS FREED: LAND/SKY/ WATER

Leedy Voulkos Galleries

October 10 – November 15, 1997

When I stepped into the Douglas Freed exhibition at the Leedy-Voulkos Galleries, I felt as if I had bumped into an electric fence of the issue-with-a-capital-I "beauty-in-art."

Exhibited were landscape paintings as simple as Haiku: lake horizons at sunset, at sunrise, and at other misty moments of stillness. There is a complex simplicity to these works. Composed of two or three joined canvases, the central panel often contains the landscape motif. The adjoining panels create an extension of or variation on an interplay of composition and color found in the central panel. Freed's palette is limited.

In *Rest*, the image in the right-hand panel seems to come out of the center landscape image. The left-hand panel continues the horizon line of the center panel, but changes the perspective.

In some paintings, the side canvases depict graduated colors that expand or augment the color scheme of the central panel as if to say, "in addition to the colors you see here, this other color scheme might exist — or did exist — or should exist."

I enjoyed the way the analogous colors melt into each other. I thought of the color field painters when I first saw these works, but I soon realized that this was not a blend of canvas staining, as in the work of Morris Lewis or Helen Frankenthaler. This was blending as in traditional oil painting, a kind of where-is-my-fan-shaped-brush kind of blending.

There has been so much discussion in this century



*Rest*, 1997, Douglas Freed, oil, 36" x 72"

over whether beauty in art is needed, or even wanted. And if beauty is there, should it consist of issues unrelated to what previously was thought of as beautiful — or a the very least, should landscape painters keep away from the sentimentality of sunsets?

Yet, Freed's landscapes are couched within a set of formal painting issues that are in reality as abstract as his previous work. His color choices and skill in blending colors that harmonize and nudge, display the wealth of experience accumulated over his painting and teaching careers. And despite the frequent discussions of beauty, it is very difficult in 1997 to find the kind of peace and stillness Freed captures. Personally, I could enjoy many moments with Freed's painting *Sequence*, in which he works out relationships among greens couched in the lavender greys of evening on one panel, and explores the possibilities of the best blues of not-quite-morning pushed up against them in the panel on the right.

Rebecca Briley