



Marilyn Lerner, *As Forms Unfold*, 1991, gouache on paper, 14 by 29 inches. Robert Morrison.

ARTnews

Marilyn Lerner

ROBERT MORRISON

In this selection of recent paintings on paper, Marilyn Lerner continues her practice of bringing together Western style and Eastern thought. What is remarkable about this group of small abstractions, collectively titled "The Jaipur Gouaches," is not only the blending of traditions, but the mastery of a medium. The result of four months Lerner spent in India as a Fulbright Fellow studying traditional gouache painting with a master painter, these little jewels have the tactile beauty of illuminated manuscripts.

Crucial to each work is the textured handmade paper, which varies in shape and ranges in color from clean white to a rich plum and deep brown. Lerner brings to this paper the fluidity of the gouache medium to explore an important aspect of abstraction, that of texture and surface. Several of the paintings give form to theories of physics, offering microscopic views of the universe. In *As Forms Unfold*, a background rectangle of loosely applied gray paint becomes an undulating surface on which densely painted, very colorful microbes hover. In *Inscribed by Hand*, white paint on white paper is the background across which star-like molecules move, centered but not restrained by an organic grid. Both works explore ideas of containment as several shapes break the frame and move onto the paper.

Marilyn Lerner has earned a well-deserved reputation for her unique abstract paintings suggesting Russian Constructivism and early modernist abstraction. Her interest in Javanese music and her summers spent on the island of Bali infuse the work with an Eastern flavor that keeps it fresh. What makes this grouping of works particularly fascinating is Lerner's grasp of a medium that gives full expression to her abstract vocabulary. —Sue Scott

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