

**Review: Lilly Wei in ARTnews, May 2010**

**Marcia Hafif at Newman Popiashvili**

The four "Black Paintings" (1979 - 1980) by seasoned abstract artist Marcia Hafif filled this gallery's modest Chelsea space. First shown together at Sonnabend Gallery in 1981, the paintings look remarkably vibrant, remarkably undated. Precisely installed, placed to maximum dialog among them and with the site, they demonstrate the kind of attention to detail and specifications Hafif shares with other so-called reductivists, including Robert Ryman.

The actual titles of the works, Black Painting: Ultramarine Blue and Burnt Umber II, for example, underscore the complicated, even visually paradoxical, concepts of black and monochrome at play here. They are inevitably slow paintings, all apparently similar at first glance. However they gradually reveal distinctive patterns and tonal shifts, from black to deep blue with a hint of ruddy warmth, conveyed by vigorous, matter-of-fact brushwork.

Hafif wrote an essay in 1978 called "Beginning Again," in which she offered ideas for the reconstitution of painting, then under attack as "dead." The "Black Paintings" constitute one realization of those ideas, emphasizing that form and content sit on top of the fundamentals of painting: oil paint, a support, and a neutral application of paint that avoids the expressive.

Seen in the context of the current reconsideration of the works of the '70s and '80s, her elegant, flickering, sensuous surfaces, 7 by 6 1/2 feet, slightly vertical in orientation, and scaled to the human body, continue to engage. They prove that there is, after all, something in the application of paint to a surface that remains profoundly gratifying, conceptually if the history interests you, visually if it does not - or, ideally both.