

THORPE FEIDT: THE ALCHEMIST'S ALTAR — PAINTINGS FROM THE AMBIGUITIES SERIES

301 Gallery @ Montserrat College of Art • Beverly, MA • www.montserrat.edu/galleries/301

Inspired by Herman Melville's dark novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, Thorpe Feidt exhibits fourteen paintings from a series he began in 1975. To date, the series consists of 450 paintings and over 1,000 drawings. Feidt studied with George McNeil, who studied with Hans Hofmann, and both Hofmann's dynamic "push and pull" and McNeil's incorporation of objective references are springboards for Feidt's progressive, expressionist agenda.

The paintings engage with darkness. Some pulsate between blackness and heat, the energy moving outward towards the viewer. In some instances, the viewer may feel as if Feidt has pulled the painting from the canvas. Others are nuanced, scaled between black and white, with an inward-pulling energy.

While the epically-scaled *Mummers: The Ambiguities 54–58 and 97–101* (86 x 276") dominates the gallery with its heat and complexity of objective references, smaller scale works also assert themselves. Yellow vertical edges of the substantive *Festive Minor, to Gerry Mulligan, Art Farmer, Bill Crow, and Dave Bailey: The Ambiguities 366*



Thorpe Feidt, *Festive Minor, to Gerry Mulligan, Art Farmer, Bill Crow, and Dave Bailey: The Ambiguities 366*, acrylic on canvas, 84 x 68", 2006.

Ambiguities 366 bracket an accretion of gestural events—a constellation of hot orange dots floats against blackness, buoyed by the nearby deepness of blue. All are anchored by a yellow cross. The luminously grayscale *The Secret Commonwealth (A)* to Robert Kirk: *The Ambiguities 292* and *The Secret Commonwealth (B)* to Robert Kirk: *The Ambiguities 293* draw the viewer in with delicate misty areas of flesh color and earthy green.

The "push and pull" occurs not just within the canvas, or even between the viewer and the paintings. They also occur between the painter and his oeuvre, and this energy changes over time. Many of the works in the exhibit have multiple dates, as Feidt often revisits and paints over his work. The textural layers enliven the color and forms of the painting. Alchemy is an interest of Feidt's; in alchemical terms, the different states of his canvas parallel the alchemical process of purification. And as the painting evolves through different levels, evidence shows that the painter evolves too.

—Mary Buccì McCoy