
ART IN REVIEW

Thomas Nozkowski

New York Studio School
8 West Eighth Street
Greenwich Village
Through March 1

This small survey of drawings by the painter Thomas Nozkowski is a tale of persistence rewarded, meaning that its second half is a lot better than its first. It begins in the late 1970's, when the components of Mr. Nozkowski's idiosyncratic, late-blooming style emerged one at a time in separate, mostly derivative works. The show traces the process by which these elements became small and then came together in big-little multifaceted forms, whose precedents include the loquacious semi-abstractions of Stuart Davis, Arthur Dove and Myron Stout.

Rough-edged shapes, densely worked surfaces and a visionary effect are evident in drawings that bring to mind Bill Jensen's early work. The mock-severity of Richard Tuttle informs a 48-drawing lexicon of white shapes on plain blue paper. By the mid-1980's, the shapes are being grouped and layered in a series of ink drawings. Maturity arrives in 1988, at least in this setting, in a drawing in which black pebblelike shapes are scattered across a blurry stream of blue on green.

Since then Mr. Nozkowski has become known for the artistic equivalent of coal: small compressed nuggets of figure and ground embedded with multiple techniques and references to cartooning, Color Field painting, Post-Minimalist geometry.

Not everything has come up roses. While some of these drawings, all from the artist's collection, dazzle, others indicate that Mr. Nozkowski may be at his best on

canvas, where the materials match his physical demands. Still, this selection reminds us that artistic originality of any kind takes time and effort. It also implies that a larger, well-chosen survey of his drawings could be both beautiful and inspiring.

ROBERTA SMITH
