

MILAN

**Ford Beckman**

GIAN FERRARI

**I**N THIS SHOW FORD BECKMAN PROVED just how disturbing a familiar image can be. The image in this case is a clown, and in his "Pop Paintings" series, Beckman borrows mass-produced portraits of clowns and reproduces them, via silk screen, onto his canvases. Gaily colored circles and stripes hover over and around these images, lending a bit of abstract play to the relentlessly guileless realism of the clowns. Because the clowns are repeated again and again in the paintings, they become nearly abstract themselves, but not quite.

Although the clown is often seen as a symbol of gaiety, there is something disturbing and malevolent behind these grinning faces. Familiar contributors to popular culture, the clowns represent mixed emotions: happiness and sadness, hope and despair. As Beckman says, "The clown is the perfect icon of our time—wonderful and joyous to some, frightening and nightmarish to others."

Beckman's "Roma" paintings made up the other half of the show. Quite large—6½ feet square—the works reflect in deeply emotional terms the artist's stay in Rome. *At the Foot of the Cross* centers on a blood-red square, which floats in a field of ocher. The surface of the painting appears decayed. Although the colors are strong, they are worn off in places or drip haphazardly down the canvas.

Perfect circles and squares, bright red or deep black, recur in both sets of paintings. The circles seem to tack down the emotionally slippery images of the clowns, while the squares of the "Roma" series suggest a feeling altogether more spiritual. Although both sets of paintings harken back to earlier art movements, the emotional impact of the "Roma" works makes them more hopeful and accessible than the grimly cheery clowns.

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