

**Peter Sullivan: *Untitled (#348)*, 1996,
oil on linen, 84 by 73 inches;
at Hirschl & Adler Modern.**



**Peter Sullivan at
Hirschl & Adler Modern**

Peter Sullivan had his first New York solo show in 1995, and this was his third since then. Large-scale abstractions in oil took up the better part of the gallery space, but several preliminary sketches in pencil, as well as some gouaches painted on stiff paper, helped clarify Sullivan's approach to abstract composition. Actually, the gouaches were among the most successful works on view: aerated constructions in ink, overlaid with gray-brown and white wash. The pen-and-ink support works have real tensile strength and are well complemented by the broader, gauzelike brushstrokes of gouache. The result recalls de Kooning's black-and-white abstractions, as well as Japanese calligraphy.

Sullivan's oils are a little taller than wide, and in each case the overall structure emerges from

interlocking and interwoven rectangular patterning. But his hand-drawn lines are not ruler-straight; his right angles only approximate 90 degrees. He applies thick, fluid paint decisively with wide brushes, achieving a glistening surface in the finished work. Sullivan's sherbet-bright color owes a lot to Hans Hofmann; in fact, *Untitled #343* overdraws that account by showcasing Hofmann's signature orange panels against an equally Hofmannesque green. Elsewhere, the color is more original, for example, in *Untitled #345*, whose plaid-on-plaid blue-grays, damson, guava and chartreuse vogue along with white pigment and bare gessoed canvas to produce a work midway between Action painting and geometric

abstraction. The oils don't yield much to close inspection (as, for example, de Kooning's do); you have to back away to see them. At the same time, though, the compositions don't want to keep their distance; they seem to bulge forward from picture planes that feel commensurately convex. The energy and freewheeling urban geometry at play here recall Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, Franz Kline's work in general and the paintings of city realists like John Button. Sullivan is more in-your-face than these artists, however, except in his gouaches, where contemplative restraint is the keynote.

—Alfred Corn