

## Andrea Belag at Bill Maynes

This was a deceptively simple show of eight oil-on-canvas abstract paintings. All were composed of juxtaposed bands, some overlapping, in a consistent palette of rich crimson, Prussian blue, yellow, orange, green and black. As predictable as this format may sound, Belag is able to find a great deal of variety in it. Indeed, it's evident that there's a restless mind at work here, placing and rearranging the same basic elements for varying effects of mood, color temperature and visual weight.

Belag's vertical rectangles resemble windows; but in this case, the "frames" of the windows are as important, and as visually assertive, as the "view." *Restless* (all works 2000) gives us a thick, black horizontal band right where our line of sight wants to penetrate the painting. We maneuver our mind's eye around and beyond it. Sometimes such potentially frustrating, casementlike stripes act as foils for other, less assertive colors. In the large canvas called *Black Tie*, a thick bar of alizarin crimson occupies the area below the black "horizon," bringing out a thinner and much brighter band of green below it. Prolonged viewing yields a host of such little pleasures, painterly encounters that seem to pulse and hum in vision.

Belag began restricting her practice to the use of vertical and



Andrea Belag; *Black Tie*, 2000, oil on canvas, 78 by 66 inches; at Bill Maynes

horizontal bands of color in 1996 and seems to have perfected her manipulation of texture and color temperature since then. The marks are spartan and easy to read, though the sense of foreground and background which they create is not. Indeed, pictorial space seems to flicker back and forth. This odd effect (of cool reds, for instance, in the foreground, and warm blues behind) combined with Belag's use of long, uninterrupted strokes, makes for strange perceptual fare. We've been trained to read a horizon where long horizontals prevail. But whether this world we perceive is yards away, poised just before our eyes or in our minds is really hard to say.

—Sarah Schmerler