

Art Beat: “Marking Time”

By Sharon Mizota

Ever wondered how many strokes it takes to make a painting? Ask Robert Sagerman. Applying dollops of paint with a palette knife, he keeps track of every color and stroke of each of his dense, multicolored, abstract paintings. Inspired by complex cabalistic readings of Jewish scripture — in which each letter can also be read as a number — the works have cryptic titles like 49:7,171 and 37:6,702, where the first number refers to the number of colors in the painting and the second documents the number of strokes. For Sagerman, painting is a ritualistic, meditative practice in which the obsessive recording of each decision and gesture is a way to focus and clear the mind. The resulting paintings are suitably contemplative squares or rectangles covered with overlapping layers of hue applied with machinelike regularity. This evenness is disrupted by the irregular edges of the paint and the eye-bending optical sensation created by intense, vibrating color. The chunks of paint are so thick they cast deep shadows, giving the works not only a sense of depth, but also an almost sculptural presence. The effect is something like gazing at a wall covered in ivy: At first it seems mundane, but on closer inspection it reveals subtly seductive patterns.

Through July 2 at Brian Gross Fine Art, 49 Geary (between Kearny and Grant), Fifth Floor, S.F. Admission is free; call 788-1050 or visit www.briangrossfineart.com.