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Art in Review



“Mind-Body Alpha” (1989), by Paul Laffoley, oil, acrylic, and vinyl lettering. KENT FINE ART, NEW YORK

Paul Laffoley

‘The Boston Visionary Cell’

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By KEN JOHNSON

Kent Fine Art

*210 11th Avenue, between 24th and 25th Streets, Chelsea
Through March 9*

Paul Laffoley, I suspect, was supposed to be a Neo-Platonist like Giordano Bruno, who was executed in 1600 for publishing his heretical beliefs. Fortunately for him and us, Mr. Laffoley was born into a more tolerant time and place: mid-20th-century Boston. Under the aegis of the Boston Visionary Cell, an organization he founded, he has been able to pursue his metaphysical research freely and to display his findings in the form of the electrifying, diagrammatic paintings he has produced over the past five decades.

Judging by his mandala-type compositions rendered in high-contrast colors and black and white, usually on square canvases, Mr. Laffoley has yet to encounter a system of mystical thought he could not absorb into his own project. Profusely annotated with press-on vinyl letters, his works refer to a dizzying array of mental adventurers, from Socrates to the Theosophist charlatan Madame Blavatsky.

His topics, illustrated by realistic images and abstract structures, include U.F.O.’s, time travel, alchemy, the mind-body problem, utopia, relativity and quantum theories, and science-fiction movies like “The Day the Earth Stood Still.” Titles like “Dimensionality: The Manifestation of Fate” (1992) give the impression of a philosopher who long ago went off the rails laid down by conventional rationalism.

Mr. Laffoley’s works may seem impenetrable, but they are not nonsensical. They limn a richly provocative cartography of consciousness itself and its heretofore under-realized possibilities. This show of works dating from the early ’60s to last year is an excellent introduction to one of the most unusual creative minds of our time.