

Tanabe — new experiences of earth and sky

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By Robert Ayre

WHEN he was last here, two years ago, the Vancouver painter Takao Tanabe gave some indication of a return to the landscape, but you can't go home again, and while there are references to summer and the sun in his current exhibition at Galerie Agnes Lefort, through April 26, there is no going back to the landscape in the sense we usually understand it.

The references are mostly in the titles. The experience of earth and sky is so remote we might never have detected it without the titles. These equations of light and space in diagrams of intense and vivid color have no atmosphere and no sensuousness. Their appeal is in their stimulus to the eye and the mind's apprehension of order.

Sometimes the hard-edged, squared and angled cut-out shapes without body are brought together in arrangements that suggest natural figures, but they remain geometry.

THE IDEA OCCURS to me, for example, that the telescoping prong of Summer Visitor might be a plant growing out of that black wedge deep-rooted in the green — but I can't feel it as a living or-

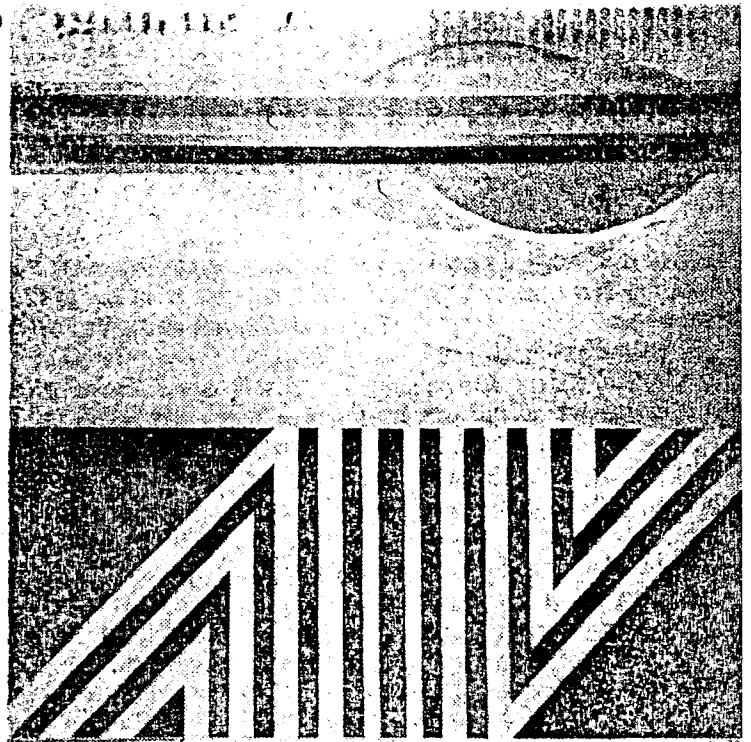
ganism. The forms called Clouds are so severely abstracted that I can't think of them as having anything to do with clouds, except in their position above the horizon. When, instead of the folded strips the painter uses rounded forms — Summer Cloud and Passing Summer Cloud — I'm not convinced, for they seem, if anything, more rigid.

In spite of the titles, we shouldn't be looking for softness and fluency, for change and mood — for life — in Takao Tanabe's acrylics. He builds uncompromising systems, trapping life in specimens of bright colors within the rectangles — Summer Cloud Trapped and Hot Summer Boxed. Any movement is mechanical: the slanting parallels, the drive of the diagonals and the upward and downward thrust of the chevrons. The Hot Summer may seem to be spilling out of its box, but it is fixed forever.

If you want more spontaneity, turn to the smaller paintings in the corridor. They are acrylics too, but they are on paper — the torn edge sometimes adds to the charm of informality — and they are treated like water colors — wet washes, splashes, dribbles, scrubbing. They are on-the-spot, unstudied snapshots of the sun, the sea and the shoreline, with all the immediacy of the sketch, everything the big acrylics in the main gallery are not.

Most of them belong to 1966 (though three of the 15 come from last year) and two are dated 1964.

The dozen big acrylics on canvas are divided just about evenly between last year and this. The intimations of lyricism, the breaking out of the box, I saw two years ago have not been realized. The lines are still hard, the shapes knife-edged; the colors unmodulated, but bright and enlivening and sometimes startling; and sometimes subdued and handsome, like the browns and olive greens of the frames around the



Takao Tanabe: "Summer Cloud," 1968, acrylic on canvas 34 x 34 ins., in his exhibition at Galerie Agnes Lefort.

gaudy patches of the Summer Cloud Trapped.

Born in Prince Rupert in 1926, Tanabe now works and teaches in Vancouver. He has recently completed a mural for the Ministry of Agriculture in Ottawa and six banners for the new Manitoba Centennial Centre. He has exhibited throughout Canada, as well as in Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Venezuela, Mexico and Japan, and he represented Canada twice in the Sao Paulo Biennials, at the Milan Triennial, the Guggenheim International in Paris and New York and in "Commonwealth Art Today" in London.

THE EXHIBITION "Seven Montreal Painters", which was the Hayden Gallery of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology earlier in the year, opened at Washington Gallery of Modern on Wednesday and will be through May 5, after which it

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