

Jamie Dalglish: *Magenta Palimpsest*, 1988, acrylic and metallic pigments on linen; at Barbara Braathen.

### Jamie Dalglish at Barbara Braathen

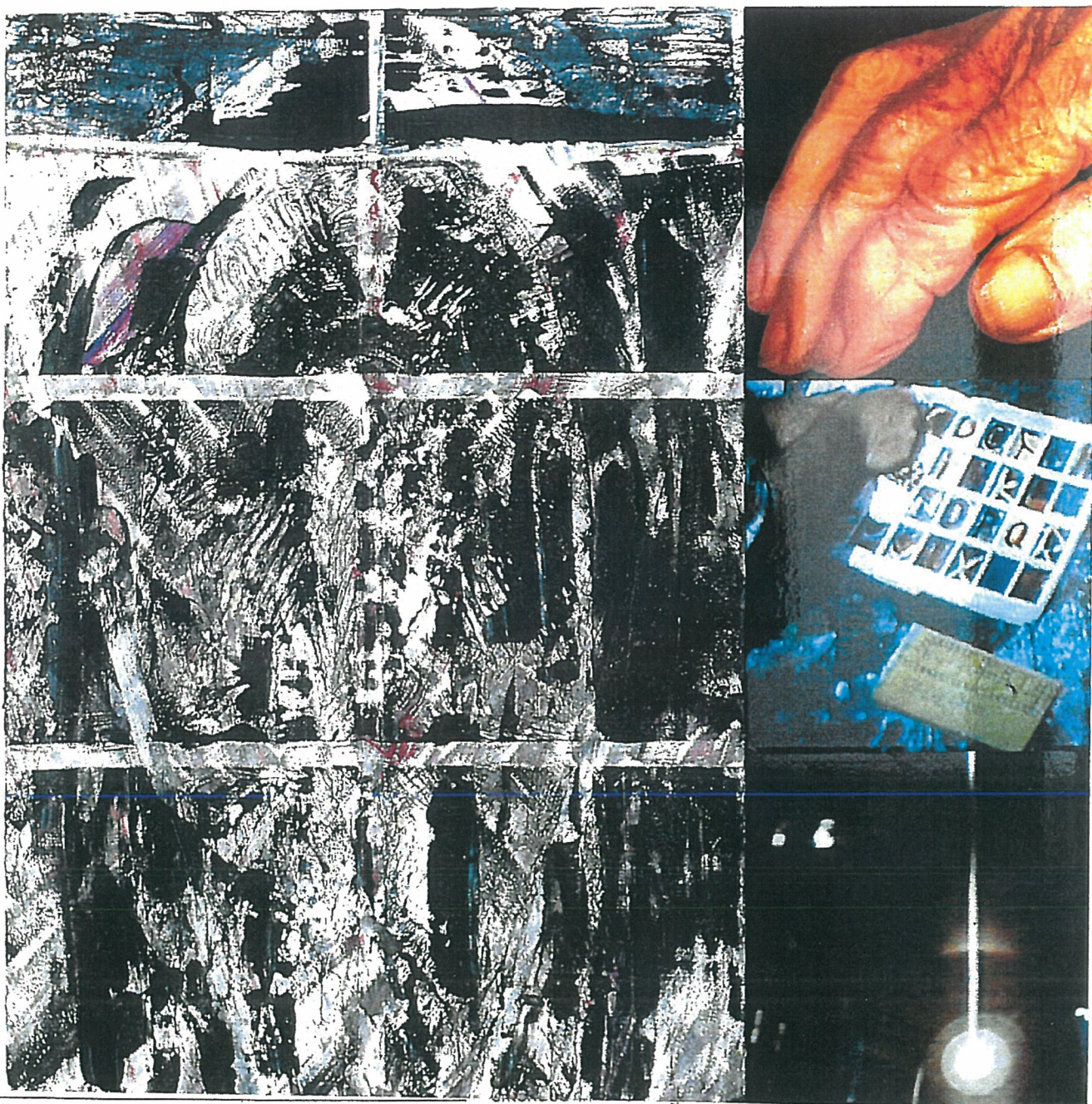
Jamie Dalglish may be seen as one of the last of the "heroic" American abstractionists. Alternatively he could be the first of an entirely new mystico-televisual breed. His paintings resemble screens or grids, and have reminded some viewers of TV images blown up to the point where the figurative element dissolves. He has loaded heavy whorls and smears of paint onto wire mesh, and one of his sculptures actually includes a TV, its screen partly obliterated by paint. His paintings are records of a series of rapid and dramatic events; they are "heroic" in the

sense that they represent an attempt to incarnate the soul on canvas. Although not specifically religious, his imposing canvases (some as large as 8 by 12 feet) resemble damaged frescoes or assemblages of burnt icons. A "Dalglish Chapel" is a perfectly plausible idea.

Dalglish's new show consisted of two sequences. The more important of the two is comprised of seven 60-by-90-inch paintings and (as installed in this exhibition) one 60-by-180-inch diptych, all of which the artist refers to as "palimpsests" (*Grass Palimpsest*, *Blond Palimpsest* and so on). Dalglish here follows a modular principle: the paintings in this series can all be grouped in diptychs, and can likewise be hung vertically or horizontally. The second sequence, called "Poltergeists" by the artist, was here represented by three six-part examples—each made up of three 20-by-24-inch paintings hung one above the other on the wall in alternation with their ghostly Polaroid reproductions. Dalglish has undoubtedly found his ideal metaphor in the idea of the palimpsest, which my dictionary defines as "a parchment or the like from which the writing has been partially or completely erased to make room for another text." Each painting is several paintings superimposed. There is considerable variation in terms of what finally shows through on the surface, but all except one of the paintings (the darkly intense *Black Palimpsest*) reveal Dalglish's revived interest in radiant color.

These palimpsests shimmer and dazzle with golds, greens, pinks and magentas, and a more restrained use of impasto gives their gorgeous surfaces the quality of costly fabrics. They could almost be mistaken for radically modern designs for ecclesiastical vestments—an impression that is enhanced when the paintings are hung vertically, and the grid or lattice that underlies them all is clearly visible, as is the case in *Magenta Palimpsest*. Here, three horizontal bars are crossed by a vertical bar at the exact center of the painting, while diagonals converge from the sides towards the bottom. This hieratic symmetry is overlaid by a design of large, blurred circles which is covered in turn by an ecstatic flurry of curving brushstrokes, as if a pillow stuffed with magenta feathers had burst while the painting was still wet.





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In Dalglish's work the grid serves the same function as the theme in a *passacaglia*. It is always there, lending harmony and balance to his burgeoning, chromatic inventions. His latest inventions count among his most seductive. The paintings' surface sheen lures the viewer on to look for the painting beneath the painting, for the secret image that seems to be hidden somewhere in the stratifications of paint.

—John Ash