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ART IN REVIEW; Vincent Longo -- 'Reflections on Abstraction'

By KEN JOHNSON

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Hunter College/Times Square Gallery

450 West 41st Street

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Honoring Vincent Longo on his retirement after 35 years of teaching painting and printmaking at Hunter College, this show of some 160 paintings, plus prints and works on paper, surveys his remarkably consistent five-decade career.

Starting under the influence of Abstract Expressionism, Mr. Longo made layered compositions of loosely gridded lines and impulsive linear marks. In the 60's, inspired by Eastern traditions and by contemporary color-based abstract painting, he made nearly Minimalist compositions of simple shapes and pure colors that call to mind Asian mandalas. Shortly thereafter he embraced the grid in a series of paintings that are like walls of brightly colored tiles.

The grid has remained the foundation of Mr. Longo's painting, but over time it has been incarnated in many ways: as lines imbedded in all-over painterly splatter; in layered fields that resemble basket weaving; in blocky compositions with brushy textures; and in luminous plaids of horizontally and vertically layered bands of color.

What gives all this a compelling sense of personal urgency, along with the purely visual appeal, is a persistent grappling with certain archetypal tensions: between the optical and the tactile; the abstract and the metaphorical; the body and the soul.

KEN JOHNSON