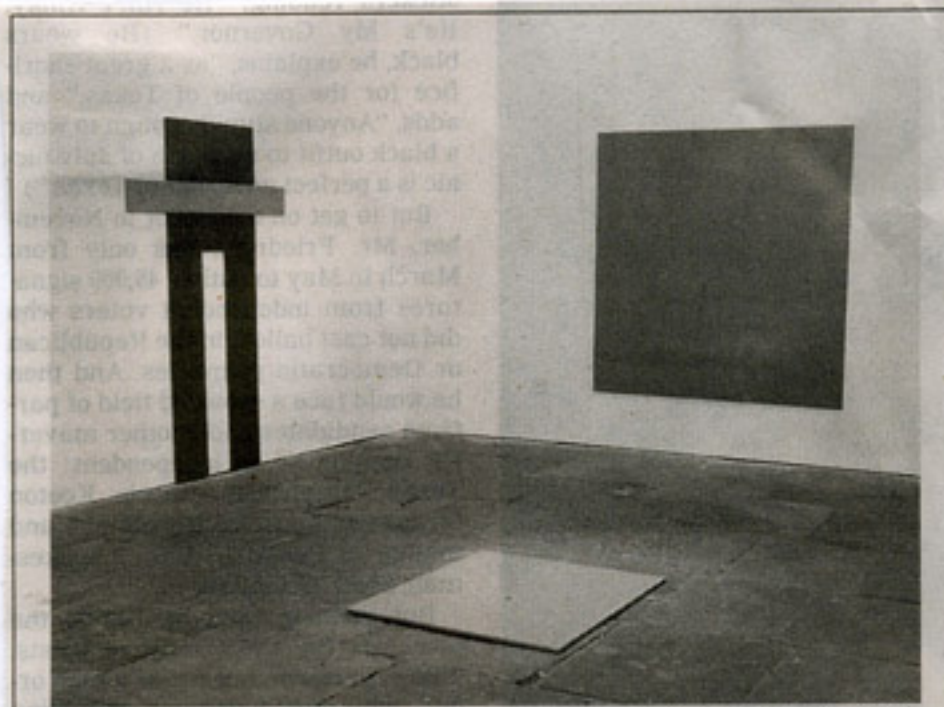


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Courtesy Joe Bradley/Canada

JOE BRADLEY: 'KURGAN WAVES' In art, pretending to be dumber, more juvenile or less rational than you are usually serves an advanced sophistication. It certainly does in the surprisingly sweet and mysteriously resonant exhibition by Joe Bradley, a young New York-based painter having his third solo show. Mr. Bradley's multipanel paintings consist of flimsy, store-bought canvases brusquely painted single colors and arranged to create the much simplified images of armless, big-shouldered figures resembling primitive video game characters. Standing almost nine feet, with their legs abutting the floor, these "big blocky guys," as the sculptor Dike Blair calls them in an essay written for the exhibition, seem to have gathered for some kind of tribal ceremony. A sky-blue canvas called "Mirror," lying on the stone floor in the center of the gallery, glows like a reflecting pool; a large, squarish canvas on the wall, painted all brown, evokes the earth (above from left "Trans," "Mirror" and "Machine Hash"). (That Kurgan is the name of an evil, immortal warrior in the cult movie "Highlander" may or may not be relevant.) To use a Minimalist vocabulary for such unabashedly anthropomorphic purposes is somehow comical. Joel Shapiro's blocky, puppetlike figures are similarly funny. Mr. Bradley's show might be a joke about what the critic Michael Fried saw as the essentially theatrical nature of Minimalist art. But it also vividly demonstrates how we may experience even the most abstract artworks as animated by life-like or supernatural energies. We may not be as sophisticated as we think. (Canada, 55 Chrystie Street, between Hester and Canal Streets, Lower East Side, (212) 925-4631, through March 4.) **KEN JOHNSON**