

Susan Breen

Woodward

Can abstraction work miracles? In other words, can that old black (or red, yellow, blue, or white) magic still cast a spell?

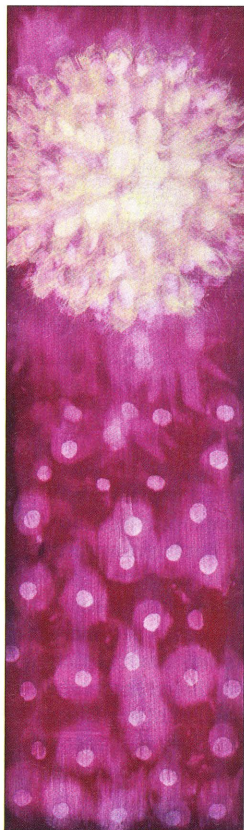
This sunny and unpretentious show of Susan Breen's "Remedy" paintings—canvases that, she has explained, are meant to "work through any number

of specific psychological, emotional, or spiritual difficulties"—hinted at how abstract painting might try to effect a cure. The results were mixed.

In *Fear of Flight* (2007), a small peachy brown oil-on-wood painting, Breen showed her mettle; *Flight* is unadulterated decoration, and it's so well constructed that it runs toward opulence. But the relationship between the remedy and the viewer's state of mind remained unclear. In the case of *For Self Doubt* (2008), the

cure could simply require staring for five to ten minutes at this soft and wispy lavender gray painting: then, if you're not feeling better by Tuesday—any Tuesday—call the gallery.

Incongruously, *For Those Nearing the End* (2008) looked a lot like *For Hiccups* (2008). That may be Breen's sense of humor showing through. One of the better works in the show, *For Kenophobia* (*Fear of Empty Space/Voids*), 2008, not only invoked an illness but also suggested a solution. With its starry black background and a white circle tossed into the center, the painting looked like a tab of antacid fizzing its way to the bottom of a glass of water. Though abstraction has never contributed much to curing social ills, it may indeed find itself better suited to treating physical and psychic ones. —Alex Taylor



Susan Breen, *For Hiccups*, 2008, oil on paper, 18" x 6". Woodward.