



Roland Ginzel: *Totally Wired*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, 61 inches square; at Dart.

reer at Gallery 400 revealed an incredible, if uneven, range of endeavor, from Abstract Expressionist work to hard-edged geometric abstraction to Minimalist Color Field—each idiom occasionally spiced with figurative elements. An exhibition of more recent work at Dart Gallery suggested the artist has lately come full-circle, returning to the Abstract-Expressionist mode he explored in the 1950s.

Ginzel moved from the academic figure studies he was producing in the 1940s directly and persuasively into abstraction. In these early works painterly passages often surround crudely drawn circles and triangles with more organic forms. In some instances, Ginzel has placed the focus of energy on a bundle of colors slapped together in one part of the canvas, while the remaining areas even out into undisturbed fields of color. His brushstrokes are by turn brashly linear, as in Franz Kline's paintings, and irregularly pooled à la Hofmann. Indeed, there seems to have been no readily recognizable or unique style to Ginzel's work of the '50s, and this diversity itself became characteristic of his work in later years.

His brief figurative phase is interesting for its sketchy mix of representational and abstract elements, even if the

results are often inconclusive and tentative. *Portrait of Claes Oldenburg* (1961), for example, is a beautiful fragment, seeming to refer to a fully realized vision despite its own incompleteness. Other works of the period introduce irresolute figurative elements into abstract compositions of even less conviction, with the result that both approaches are compromised. In still other works, such as *Double Portrait of Non-Existent People* (1963), a kind of Baconesque grotesquerie prevails.

Returning to a more abstract orientation, Ginzel began in the mid-'60s to isolate biomorphic shapes on neutral-colored grounds. He also tried to combine geometric grid layouts with freer, Abstract-Expressionist elements, sometimes adding the fully realized figure of a bird. As the Pop art era reached its height, his abstract forms grew momentarily more playful, suggesting such recognizable signs as heart shapes or numbers. He then launched into a phase of hard-edged, geometric painting—*Squarescape* (1968) is typical—that relies on a bright palette and a puzzle-piece approach to composition, as though in some Pop version of late Kandinsky. By the early '70s, Ginzel had begun the series of paintings that were to

become his trademark for many years, starting with his "Homage" works, in which stripe patterns are cut up into geometric compartments, and evolving into the so-called "Desbarats" paintings, in which the stripes have been reduced to thin rectangular strips, like military ribbons, melting into orange, red or yellow fields.

Ginzel's overall career is so various both in its stylistic phases and its level of achievement that it thwarts any easy assessment. Ironically, however, it does seem that Ginzel is at his best when temporarily departing from his chosen style of the time. Even in the exhibition at Dart of his most recent paintings, the rule holds: while most of the works feature wall-to-wall abstract doodles, an anomalous work such as *Uncurved Space* (1985) offers a more solid structure, a more subtle sense of color and a more sophisticated handling of paint. Speaking of structure, he also seems to fare better with works that rely on strong geometric motifs, such as his untitled 1980 series of drawings or his *Al Held-like Untitled* (1981). Unfortunately, these are not typical. The paradox is that Ginzel's signature compositions are his least accomplished or interesting efforts, while his best work often appears to have come from another hand altogether.

—Michael Bonesteel

## CHICAGO

### Roland Ginzel at Gallery 400 and Dart

Roland Ginzel is Chicago's best known senior abstract artist. In a city that has—at least until recently—maintained a spotty allegiance to the abstract tradition, Ginzel's work is a model of dedication. The recent retrospective of his ca-