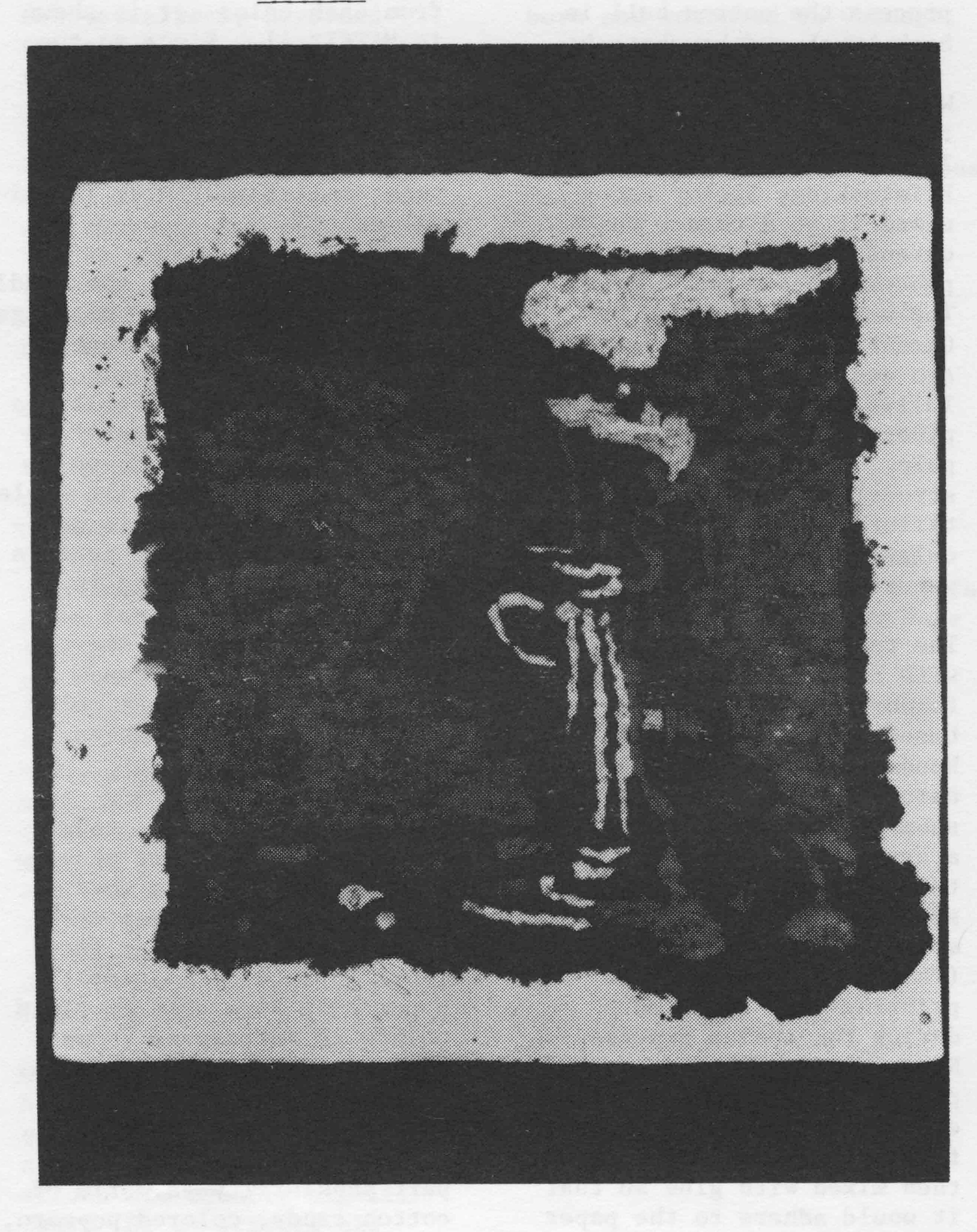
From the series Candles, 1980



For more than ten years Joseph Zucker has been making paintings by affixing paintsaturated cotton balls to stretched canvas. The earliest of these works were made in mosaic fashion, with each cotton ball forming a discrete unit. In the mid seventies, he altered the process somewhat by stretching the balls into shapes which fit in and around one another. Critics have observed that in Zucker's process the cotton ball is both brush and brushstroke.

When the opportunity arose to work at San Francisco's Institute for Experimental Printmaking, Zucker recognized it as a chance to extend his iamge-making process into a new medium. The workshop, founded by Garner Tullis eight years ago and now directed by Ann Tullis, specializes in castpaper prints made from paper pulp. The method of constructing the prints is tailored to meet the particular needs of each artist who comes there to work.

The transition from working with cotton balls on canvas to working with cotton fiberbased paper pulp on sheets of handmade paper was very natural for Zucker. He submitted a simple drawing of a candle in a candlestick to the workshop which was silkscreened onto the paper specially made for the prints. (This is the only actual printing that occurred during the entire process.) Next, over thirty buckets of paper pulp were prepared, each colored with a different fabric dye. The pulp was then mixed with glue so that it would adhere to the paper support. At this point, Zucker took over the fabrication, dipping into the

tubs with his hands and molding the wet, malleable substance onto the surface of the sheets of heavy paper. Zucker's method of manipulating the pulp on the paper relates remarkably closely to the way he creates his cotton on canvas paintings.

Zucker made thirty-six prints in all, each composed of six to ten colors. The edition is comprised of twelve color-related sets of three. One from each color set is shown in MATRIX 41. Since no two prints are exactly alike, it is more accurate to think of the prints as a series than as an edition, as the latter term implies multiple, identical units.

According to Zucker, the candle image (first used in paintings from 1973-74) is a metaphor for a pre-electric world where handcraft was still the predominant form of manufacture. The image is drawn in a basic, cartoon-like style so that its identity is maintained amid the dense texture and bold color. There is, however, an intentional play between the real and the abstract; the image tends to dissolve into abstract color areas as the viewer moves closer to the print.

High-key, even gaudy, color has been a consistent characteristic of Zucker's work since he began working with cotton. He found that the fabric dyes used to tint the paper pulp were able to yield colors as intense as those that appear in his paintings. The bright color, together with the prosaic subject matter, evokes an amusement part sensibility--a world of cotton candy, colored popcorn, and cheap souvenirs. In his work, Zucker ignores the traditional distinction made

between fine and popular art, a distinction he finds both artificial and limiting.

When Zucker began to show his

work in New York in the late sixties, it had a radically different look from predominant art-world styles of the time. Minimal painters, whose work relied on a reduced number of elements and a limited palette, were widely recognized. Other artists, who were known as Conceptualists, devoided themselves of the necessity to make objects at all, asserting that the idea was of primary importance. Zucker did not feel comfortable with either position and chose to use representational subject matter in the form of brightly colored, commonplace objects and scenes. By the mid seventies it became apparent that other artists were also reintroducing recognizable imagery into their paintings. These artists, which included Neil Jenney and Susan Rothenberg (see MATRIX 3) among others, share certain attitudes such as the use of disjointed, isolated images simply, even crudely, drawn. The notion of Decorative painting gained currency in the seventies, and Zucker is often associated with the painters of this group as well. Like Zucker, many of the Decorative painters use highly saturated color and exaggerated texture in an unabashed celebration of the oft-maligned ornamental function of art.

Without denying the joyous, humorous, or even the kitsch quality of his work, Zucker asserts that formal considerations are equally significant. He constructs his pictures in a highly disciplined and complex manner which requires simultaneous

manipulation of color, material, form and image.

It is, indeed, the artist's sophisticated knowledge of abstract picture-making utilized in the creation of his work which gives enduring, as well as immediate, pleasure to the viewer.

Zucker currently works and lives in New York, where he is represented by the Holly Solomon Gallery. He was born and educated in Chicago, receiving his B.F.A. (1964) and M.F.A. (1966) degrees from The Art Institute of Chicago. The prints on view were published by Pace Editions Inc., New York.

Works in MATRIX:

Candles, 1980, 12 from a series of 36, silkscreened, hand-colored cast paper prints, 36" x 36" each. Lent by Pace Editions, Inc., New York.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN '68; Bykert Gallery, NY '75; Daniel Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco '75; Baltimore Museum of Art, MD '76 (cat. pub.); Holly Solomon Gallery, NY '78, '79, '80; Mayor Gallery, London, Eli Whitney and the Cotton Gin '79; Galerie Bischofberger, Zurich Switzerland '80; Pace Editions, NY, Toucans '80.

Selected group exhibitions: Walker Art Center, MN, Twelve Chicago Painters '66; Bykert Gallery, NY '69, '71, '74, '75; Daniel Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco, Zucker, Close, Artschwager '76, also La Jolla Museum of Art, CA; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, New Image Painting '78 (cat. pub.); Pace Gallery, NY, Grids, Format and Image in 20th Century Art '79, also Akron Art Institute, OH (cat. pub.); 39th Venice Biennale, Italy, Art of the Seventies: Open 80, and Drawings: The Pluralist Decade '80 (cat. pub.); Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA, Drawings: The Pluralist Decade (American Version) '80, also Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (cat. pub.).

Selected bibliography about Zucker:

Smith, Roberta. "Reviews,"

Artforum, vol. 12, no. 8

(April '74).

Finch, Christopher. "Joe Zucker: The Fabric of the Painting," Arts Magazine, vol. 50, no. 8 (April '76).

Kertess, Klaus. "Joe Zucker's Tales of Cotton," Arts Magazine, vol. 54, no. 7 (March '80).

See also catalogues as indicated under list of exhibitions.

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