

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ART IN REVIEW; Cy Twombly - New York Times

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December 2, 2005

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By ROBERTA SMITH

Bacchus  
Gagosian Gallery  
980 Madison Avenue, at 77th Street  
Through Dec. 23

Covering the walls of a sky-lighted space, Cy Twombly's eight-painting "Bacchus" series is little short of a visual tsunami. Waves of pure, red-hot red, almost visible before you see the canvases, engulf the eye from all sides. These waves emanate from immense spiraling scribbles, similar to those that have periodically rolled across Mr. Twombly's paintings (most singularly in his Blackboard series of the early 1960's, a homage to Leonardo's deluge drawings).

Circling down and up nearly the full 10-foot height of the canvases, these scrolling tumbleweeds have never been rendered at such a towering scale. They've also never been rendered in red, or across warm buff grounds that intimate pinkish sand to the red's suggestion of blood. The paintings were made specifically for this space. In their size and rough, dripping, wide-brush physicality, they take a few pages from Richard Serra's oil-stick drawings, or even his sculptures.

More important, they give the nervous energy and calligraphic linearity of Mr. Twombly's early work a force they have often been accused of lacking. This is not a complete surprise; part of Mr. Twombly's development has been toward a more emphatic painterly style. Witness the large canvases of his 1993-94 "Four Seasons," which have been hanging in the immense central atrium of the Museum of Modern Art since last summer; they are the first paintings displayed in that arena not only to withstand its brutal scale, but to be enhanced by it.

The effect of the works at Gagosian is simultaneously grand and violent -- appropriate to Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and the vine and, by extension, of exhilarating creative freedom, seasonal growth and also destruction. There is a kind of two-by-two progression of energy, composition and density. The two canvases flanking the door feature relatively open double rows: a thinner, more calligraphic band atop a band of broader, freer loops. In the next two, the spirals hover slightly above the bottom edge like angry clouds, with drips and pools of red providing added pictorial action below. Across the way the looping scribbles build into impenetrable thickets, if not fiery bluffs. In the central two, slightly taller than the other six and painted after them, the lines thicken and leap and twist exuberantly, daring you to figure out how they were made. With a ladder? Mr. Twombly is known to be quite tall, but he is also in his 76th year. These amazing, angry, joyful, enveloping surfaces are in the tradition of the aging artist letting it rip.