

Art in America

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CHRIS JOHANSON DEITCH PROJECTS

What does painting have to apologize for? No answers, but contrition aplenty, were at hand in Chris Johanson's installation "Totalities," which presented some three dozen acrylic-on-wood paintings, mounted on rough wooden supports and standing penitently in a circle around a slowly rotating, gray-painted plywood icon. One of the icon's jagged facets was mirrored, and fleetingly caught glimpses of surrounding walls and images. The paintings, their backs turned to the entering viewer, were arranged in such close ranks that many could be seen only obliquely. Audible throughout was an ominous recorded drumbeat, accom-



VIEW OF CHRIS JOHANSON'S EXHIBITION "TOTALITIES," 2008, SHOWING ACRYLIC-ON-WOOD PAINTINGS, AT DEITCH PROJECTS.

panied, in part, by droning bells. The approach to this dim sanctuary was past a floor-to-ceiling plywood entry wall checkered in a global range of skin tones (the territory is early Byron Kim), then through a ramped, sloped-walled, gray-painted wood tunnel.

Part coven, part campfire and part cabinet of Dr. Caligari, "Totalities"

included several thoroughly compelling abstractions, some funky psychedelic pinwheels of paint that build at the center to thickly impastoed crescendos, others geometric affairs of tidy stripes and grids, and in one case a neo-precisionist composition in which a big, windowless building is rendered in pegboard and wood pan-