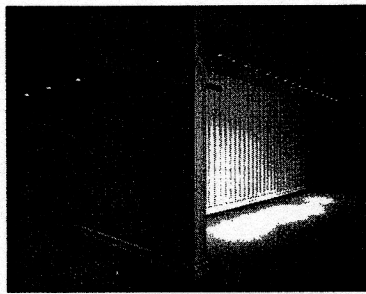


## ATLANTA

In juxtaposition to these impressive yet not fully realized solo efforts, the three-woman exhibition **DIMENSION** (Dalton Gallery, Agnes Scott College, September 9—October 15) proved that the interactive dynamic of a well-curated group show may indeed be both more provocative and intellectually satisfying. The relationship between the three painters—Frances Barth, Annette Cone-Skelton and Leslie Wayne—invited by curator Cathy Byrd bear only a tangential connection. Precisely because there was no prearranged pattern of likeness linking their work, the allusive title sparked a succession of literal and symbolic connotations. While "dimension" might remark directly upon the deep material spaces of Wayne's work, where the small paintings offer up their chromatic insides like eviscerated crevasses, the concept of spatial and even temporal volume applies more to Barth's and Cone-Skelton's work.

Of the three artists, Barth is the poet. Her painting, which at first seems faint, is upon prolonged looking revealed to be rapt with quietude, intent upon describing what it feels like to experience a moment of recognition. Because her command of painting's subtle maneuvers—of tone, hue, texture, line, design and shape—is consummate, her ability to fold one syntactic code into another creates environments of alluring complexity. In *sal.-v* (1997), for example, the image is part-landscape, part abstract design. With her vocabulary apparently inspired by Japanese painting and printmaking, Barth describes the rudiments of a mountainous landscape—an island world that resides along a far horizon, bisecting the metaphoric realms of painting and drawing, of formalism and narrative, and, implicitly, of Western painting and an alternative Eastern model. The title *sal.-v*, a fractured linguistic entity that requires associative completion through the viewer's pronunciation of its sounds, relays the hybrid status of her nuanced image. With such titles, relating to the way that German artist Helmut Dorner relies upon fragments of language(s) to translate the fertile essences of his painting, Barth seduces possibility, inviting reverie in implied interpretations.

If painting is understood by Barth to establish a space for fictive imaginings, Annette Cone-Skelton created a work that was firmly rooted in the reality of built architectural space. A remarkable feature of the Dalton Gallery are the sliding gates that seal off the exhibition spaces from the adjoining parts of the building. Access to stairways is blocked when the gates—tall, beige-painted, gothic-themed iron bars—are drawn shut. Because of the building's fluid and complicated floor plan, numerous sections of gates are present. For her installation, Cone-Skelton closed all of the gates and mimed their linear presence to create a continuous wall-painting of entrancing, ensconcing significance. Cone-Skelton replicated the design of the gates, reiterating their repetitious form on every available white wall in her section of



Annette Cone-Skelton, *Gothic Arch Installation*, 1999, site-specific wall painting, dimensions variable (photo courtesy of Agnes Scott College).

"Dimension." A meandering vacant space became transformed through *Gothic Arch Installation* into a replete environment of linear pattern—a total space of painting that vibrated, referentially, between a Ross Bleckner, Op Art-derived stripe painting and the wall works of Sol LeWitt. Walking through the paradoxically open but assertively demarcated rooms of *Gothic Arch Installation* enticed one to contemplate the architecture of the Dalton Gallery, and to ponder the peculiar feature of the ever-present gates. The gallery space, designed by Atlanta architect John Portman, who in this instance seems to have been thinking about the curvaceous, vevy interiors of Morris Lapidus, becomes a porous container.

Standing within Cone-Skelton's painting invited one to contemplate the dissolution of the gates and to contemplate the possibility of whether painting could physically affect architecture, even transform its material reality into an alternative domain—another dimension.

By contrast to this large, installed work, Leslie Wayne's new paintings offered intimate entry into the fleshy center of her small, paint saturated domain. While Wayne's work of the past several years had settled into a familiar mode of repeal, where she masterfully would peel back the skins of still-wet works to archaeologically reveal the prior life of paint's application, her new work blossoms in another direction, literally. Now we are force to move into the paintings' chromatic layers. The most successful works displayed here, set in a radial arrangement playing off against the glass of windows, were either puncture or "gash" paintings, as the artist has referred to them. Their sheer physicality is entralling. One sees into the work and can imagine the artist reaching her hands into the wet paint, touching the inner flesh or opening up the skin of a wound. If her prior work transacted the drama of Action Painting in a micro-managed form, this new work transforms the corporeal reference into the almost painful domain of pure flesh.

The plurality of painting's praxis is what makes it such a resilient medium. "Dimension" offered an excellent occasion to encounter three completely disparate painting options and to value the differences as much as one puzzled over ways of constructing linkages.

David Moos  
Birmingham, Alabama