

## The Tales We Tell: The Work of Tom Block

Baltimore, MD, Summer 2001 | [Link 6](#)

"With the

*Baal Shem Tov*

series, Block renders spiritual legends in a vine-like weave of tangled characters and impressions. To create these images, a painted canvas is scraped and pressed with small painted swaths of paper. The process, which Block calls printing, produces two works: one, the large, densely painted scenes of flat patterns and the other, small but seemingly expansive landscaped scenes.

"Block reads and then interprets the Baal Shem Tov legends and then renders them physically on canvas with each 'paper to paper' print. On the smaller paper pieces, the printing process leaves behind the negative of the larger work, puckered splotches of paint resembling small relief drawings of a mountain range, or flatter, more aqueous fields of color. Displayed delicately by themselves as the 'process' pieces, they seem to be a metaphor for the reinventing or reinterpreting of the original -- they are both process and product.

"Another of Block's most recent series is *Heretical Paintings*, based on 14th-century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart's teachings, which stressed the ability of man to search beyond the trappings of the holy church, the inherent pride of the body, and the deceptively supportive earth to reach a fortifying spiritual union with God. In these organic abstractions of deep purple, velvet blue, muted fluorescent green, and soft reds, Block seems to have flattened under a microscope images that morph and mold, glide and delve into one another as they try to find that higher ground. With more depth than the larger works of the *Baal Shem Tov* series, yet less than the small 'process' abstracts, the *Heretical* pieces are generously painted with oil on old decaying wooden palettes. These works play out the metaphor of transcendence over the earthly flesh by building up upon themselves; revealing in swirls and valleys of palpable color the search beyond the iconic and the prophetic. They are the knowledge that comes through the translation a physical mark-making as visual/verbal communication."

**Elizabeth Donovan, Baltimore, MD, Summer 2001**