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Gallery Going

by Gary Michael Dault

Patrick Howlett at Susan Hobbs

\$1400-\$1800. Until Jan. 24

137 Tecumseth St.; 416-504-3699

Patrick Howlett's modestly-scaled, scratchy little non-representational paintings in egg tempera might well be regarded as merely pretty (little two-dimensional assemblages of angled wedges of usually pastel-hued paint) if it weren't for Howlett's canniness in cueing them to an apparently tautological mountain-climbing expression ("the higher you get the higher you get") and in turn, linking *that* reference to a continuing interest in the mountain-inspired, theosophically-imbued paintings of the Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris's late geometric abstractions.

The linkage is tenuous, I'd say, but it gives Howlett a chance to make his satisfyingly tight, tense little abstractions with the value-added insistence that they are about *something* beside pure visual pleasure. Thus his modernity.

Theosophy is - or was (since it seemed briefly important to people like the poet W.B. Yeats, Piet Mondrian and other artists and men and women of letters in the early 20th century) - a mystical, semi-philosophy that tried to set up parallels between the nature of physical forms and a certain straining after a perfection of ideas those forms could perhaps reflect. The steepness of a triangle's apex or that of a mountain's peak could come to be seen as equivalents - making visible inner states of mind.

How this works itself out in Howlett's paintings is not easy to say and he seems not to be especially analytical about it. You do feel, though, when you look at them, that they possess a deeper core of meaning than seems immediately available. I guess the further you go, the further you go.