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enrich historical echoes



New York painter Louise Fishman's "Unfeathered Blue" (1998). Chronicle Photo by

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[Conferences](#)

[Searches](#)

[Index](#)

[Jump to](#)

[GO](#)



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[Music & Nightlife](#)

[Performance](#)

[Art](#)

[Events](#)

[Books](#)

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[Radio](#)

Fishman's Relaxed Abstract Expression Paintings enrich historical echoes

[Kenneth Baker](#)



Relaxation, not urgency, is the mark of maturity in abstract painting now. We feel it everywhere in the recent work of New York painter Louise Fishman at Anglim.

Fishman paints in an abstract expressionist vein. Every picture is a loosely woven fabric of paint strokes, a tissue of matter, space and light. Not the image, but the flesh of a possible world.

The assurance of Fishman's hand, rather than its speed, tells us that a painting such as the magnificent "August" (1998) is improvised in structure and color.

One by one, its brush marks look brisk, but air seems to come between them, hinting that long pauses punctuate Fishman's painting process.

The rhythm of inaction seems as important as the tempo of execution in pictures such as "August" (1998), "Blue to Blue" (1999) and "Unfeathered Blue" (1998).

Fishman is well aware she is working long after the heyday of abstract expressionism, when people saw explosions of originality in the work of painters such as Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock.

Today, originality seems a thing of the modernist past. Fishman treats as an aspect of her material the fact that every kind of paint mark seems coded now with references to past art.

The ultramarine strokes that surge through her "Blue to Blue" dance willingly with de Kooning's ghost.

"October" (1998) is a hale remembrance of Joan Mitchell, or of her work, anyway.

"Unfeathered Blue" flickers with surprising evocations of Parisian painting: Pierre Soulages, Fernand Leger, even Henri Rousseau.

Fishman's work benefits from such associations for two reasons.

One is that she seems to have discovered them before we do, by noticing what shakes out of her own painting process.

The second reason is that her paintings are full-voiced enough to carry and enrich whatever historical echoes they set up.

Saturday, April 24, 1999

San Francisco Chronicle
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The intelligent athleticism Fishman displays is a rare thing in contemporary culture. Even if abstract painting is not the prime vehicle for such virtuosity now, her work is good enough to make us think it is.

PATRICK WILSON ON THE EDGE

A confidence very different from Fishman's is displayed in the new work by Los Angeles painter Patrick Wilson at Gross.

Whereas Fishman flirts with gibberish, Wilson risks looking too calculated. He smooths away all traces of gesture, leaving a pattern of decisions as crisp as a chessboard.

"In Your Head" (1999), more than 5 by 6 feet, is the largest painting here. It is a clean, white field with two small open rectangles stacked halfway up at its right edge and three stacked at its left.

Closer inspection reveals that the small rectangles are slightly trapezoidal, subtly loosening what would otherwise be a too-rigid compositional order.

In "In Your Head," the figures keep the eye shuttling between one side of the picture and the other in a manner reminiscent of Morris Louis' "Unfurleds."

The small shapes are actually relief elements, sleek layerings of paint that look like collage elements.

What keeps Wilson's work from turning brittle are subtle adjustments of measure, finish, scale and internal light that are the paintings' content.

His pictures' success depends on a degree of complexity. The smallest ones here, though an interesting experiment, seem too simple for their own good.

AT THE GALLERIES

LOUISE FISHMAN: Abstract paintings. Through May 29.
Gallery Paule Anglim, 14 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 433-2710.

PATRICK WILSON: Abstract paintings. Through May 15. Brian Gross Fine Art, 49 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 788-1050.

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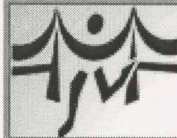
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