

## ART REVIEW

## Palettes Full of Ideas About What Painting Should Be

By ROBERTA SMITH

**N**EW YORK CITY has many things in quantity, and one is surely painting. Moving through its many museums and galleries, you can encounter works by masters long dead and living. You can see brand new works by young unknowns and those of painters who have tolled for years in relative obscurity. They all conspire to make New York one of the world's great centers of painting, and of the debate about painting. For every painting is, among other things, an argument about what painting should be.

At the moment, painting is especially visible, even by New York standards, so the debate is unusually pitched, almost an esthetic war zone. Most prominent, of course, are the major museum retrospectives that bring two of the medium's elder statesmen head to head: Jasper Johns's brooding ambiguities of image and surface, at the Museum of Modern Art, are locked in spirited exchange with Ellsworth Kelly's sometimes dazzling purities of form and color at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

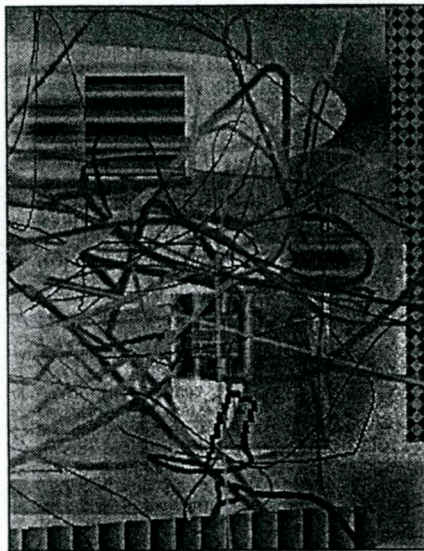
Other participants in the debate in Manhattan range from Lucian Freud at Aquavella to Gerhard Richter at Marian Goodman and Eric Fischl at Mary Boone. And, from beyond the grave, from Max Beckmann at the SoHo Guggenheim to Jean-Michel Basquiat at Tony Shafrazi, with Philip Guston at David McKee and Edwin Dickinson at Tibor de Nagy falling somewhere between.

And this is only the top layer. All over town, younger or less well known painters are putting forth their best arguments in the form of painting shows, and it's great fun to get caught in the crossfire. Here is a sampling of those exhibitions.

**Louise Fishman**

Louise Fishman's argument for a felt, gestural form of abstraction has improved considerably, and by including paintings from the last three years, her current show, at the Robert Miller Gallery on 57th Street, makes the improvement especially clear. This show, her 13th since 1977, is a kind of debate all by itself.

Ms. Fishman seems to be forsaking the hulking, rather bombastic scaffoldings of recent years, represented here by works like "Blonde Ambition" and "Heart in Hand." Her new efforts feel much more painted,



Luhring Augustine (above); Robert Miller (right).

A detail from "A Prehistoric Hand," above, by Albert Oehlen, at Luhring Augustine; "Fire Over the Lake," by Louise Fishman, at Robert Miller.

**David Row**

A few floors up from the Fishman show, David Row operates on the assumption that the future of painting is formalist. His big, handsome works at André Emmerich/Sotheby's, as the gallery is now called, layer together complex processes (including templates, screen printing and Richter-like blurs) with an imagery that centers on repeating open ellipses. Across separate panels and multicolored grids, and in lively contrasting colors, these ellipses disintegrate into coiled lines and then big flamelike strokes, with a centrifugal energy that can seem cinematic.

**Albert Oehlen**

The messy Popified Expressionism of the German painter Albert Oehlen has always implied that abstract painting should be as nasty and inelegant as it wants to be. But he's never brought it off as well as in his new works at Luhring Augustine in SoHo, although this is not entirely a compliment.

These new efforts are initiated on a computer, whose digitalized graph-

Mr. Oehlen conducts the exercise with loud, fluorescent colors.

**Bill Komoski, Carl Fudge and Jane Fine**

There are a number of other painters exhibiting in SoHo who value thin, weightless compositions or the look, if not the actual use, of the computer. Bill Komoski's big print-like paintings, at Feature, could easily have been lifted from the computer screen, although their bright colors, strange bumps, blank (and sometimes singed) areas suggest burnt and melted versions of Mr. Oehlen's paintings. (Also good at Feature, even if it's not a painting, is a single sculpture by Jim Iserman, a large foam cube covered with specially woven checked fabric that suggests a giant ottoman decorated by Sol LeWitt.)

Carl Fudge's large, intricately patterned paintings, seen in the artist's second solo at the Lauren Wittels Gallery, evoke computer screen savers or unusually fancy Formica; they also owe a considerable debt to Christopher Wool's "wallpaper" paintings. They're actually made with silk-screens whose patterns are



minor master. As his show at Jay Gorney Modern Art in SoHo demonstrates, his specialty is thin layers of painterly color that bring to mind lyrical abstraction, a brief painting trend of the late 1960's, when Mr. Wegman was starting out as an artist. These fluctuating fields are then punctuated with tiny figures and objects, converting them into landscape spaces alternately vast or bucolic.

Sometimes it takes almost nothing: a tiny two-mast ship planted at the center of "Lunar Sea," for example, or the regiments of stick figures scattered across the sandy tones of "Civil War." In other instances, like "Tunnel of Sleep" and "Yellow Bridge," we are treated to an encyclopedic trip through different times and places. Mr. Wegman rounds out the show with some watercolors that wittily extend a series of schmaltzy greeting cards into larger landscapes, works very much in the vein of his jokey early drawings but far more skillful.

**Trevor Winkfield**

Like Mr. Wegman, the English-born New York painter Trevor Winkfield is bent on a maximum ratio of

leg at the center of "Trapping the Birds and the Bees."

**Lisa Yuskavage**

For Lisa Yuskavage, painting is not so much a fusion of representation and abstraction as of political and formal, and maybe high and low. In her New York debut at Boesky & Gallery, Ms. Yuskavage continues to define a world of demonically distorted Kewpie-doll women, mostly naked and slothful. These distasteful figures inhabit grounds of smooth, glowing color whose soft, blended pastels evoke generations of girlish color-coordinated bedrooms and outfits distilled into an atmospheric modernist monochrome. Although Ms. Yuskavage is capable of positing a mildly perverse-looking still life in a glowing haze of blue, her real subject seems to be a limited range of "girl secrets," including envy, overeating and overexercising.

"Foodeating Hardplace" focuses attention on the distended stomach and nauseated face of a creature clearly on the verge of tossing her cookies. Meanwhile, the maiden with the upturned buttocks who inhabits the aqua haze of "Wrist Corsage"

**Where to Find The Galleries**

Here is information on the painting shows at Manhattan galleries mentioned in the accompanying art review, in the order mentioned.

**LOUISE FISHMAN**, Robert Miller Gallery, 41 East 57th Street, through Nov. 16.

**DAVID ROW**, André Emmerich/Sotheby's, 41 East 57th Street, through Nov. 9.

**ALBERT OEHLER**, Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince Street, SoHo, through Nov. 16.

**BILL KOMOSKI**, Feature, 76 Greene Street, SoHo, through Nov. 23.

**CARL FUDGE**, Lauren Wittels Gallery, 48 Greene Street, SoHo, through Nov. 9.

**JANE FINE**, Casey Kaplan, 48 Greene Street, SoHo, through Nov. 9.

**WILLIAM WEGMAN**, Jay Gorney Modern Art, 100 Greene Street, near Prince Street, SoHo, through Nov. 30.

**TREVOR WINKFIELD**, Donahue/Sostinski Gallery, 560 Broadway, at Prince Street, SoHo, through Nov. 16.

**LISA YUSKAVAGE**, Boesky & Gallery, 51 Greene Street, SoHo, through Nov. 16.

**JULIA JACQUETTE**, Holly Solomon Gallery, 172 Mercer Street, at Houston Street, SoHo, through tomorrow.

**MANUEL OCAMPO**, Annina Nosel Gallery, 530 West 22d Street, Chelsea, through Nov. 7.

conventions, especially the old-fashioned illustration, to focus on confused desires and displaced appetites. Her paintings are bright, well made and funny, as in a beautifully painted plate of cold cuts that bears the inscription, "I Can't Get You Out of My Mind."

**Manuel Ocampo**

In his second show at the Annina Nosel Gallery in Chelsea, Manuel Ocampo, a Philippine-born artist living in Los Angeles, continues to scale down effects first ventured by Julian Schnabel, deploying them in meditations on history as sarcastic as they are seductive. Sarcasm is reserved for everyone, starting with the Roman Catholic Church, and the results often suggest decaying ex-votos of an especially malignant sort.

In "Uber," the purple robe of a kneeling priest is more Ku Klux Klan