

Judith Geichman has been painting for a long time, and every painting she has ever done is contained in the latest. Her oeuvre is less a progression or development than an amalgamation, an organic concretion. The newest works are literally so. Layers of poured and brushed and dripped and smeared paint are combined with glued-on skins of paint, each with nearly as complex an individual genesis.

The colors are quite beautiful, joyful at one extreme and chthonically chaotic at the other. Like the collection of tattered, rusted metal road-kill that decorates the studio wall, or the spattered, paint-encrusted studio floor, they record the messy energy of life.

Images inevitably appear—fish and smurfs and figures—neither appropriated nor conjured, but also not guarded against, nor self-consciously effaced. Washes of paint magically mimic other techniques. The intensity and visual complexity of the paintings permit teasingly identifiable references without being threatened by a literal reading.

The paintings ooze, not only with paint, but with several layers of history. There is, of course, the immediate history of the process, which yields a rich, often unexpected surface. The lively wet paint is frozen, captured, and overlaid with other once-living patterns, which do not interact physically, but in a kind of conversation based on proximity. The conversation is in the formal language of line, shape and color, and in the tension between the aggressive physical surface and the illusion of space. There is a curious, almost fractal reiteration in the way individual shapes and passages recapitulate the structure of the whole. Patches of paint, arrested in various stages of growth and decay, form a cinematic rhythm—not dead paint skins, but an organic, breathing entity.

There is history in the connection to New York School painting, to a tradition of non-objective painting that is not merely formal, but explores broad human experience. This is not, however, recycled, revitalized Abstract Expressionism. Working fifty years later, at the end of the century, and having survived years of Post-Modern cynicism, Geichman is as much smart as sensitive. For all their exuberance, the paintings are subtly but definitely controlled, considered, distanced. They are collections of moments, accumulations of carefully husbanded accidents.

Most important is a history somewhere in the middle, between the immediate object and the distant literature: the personal history of one painter's art life. The last fifteen years of Geichman's painting, the early pattern paintings, the subject-oriented explorations of her spiritual roots, the more recent experiments with the materiality of paint, may not be readily readable, but form a rich stock that infuses each subsequent addition.

These are not, in fact, primarily works of expression, but introspection. Like reading her own tea leaves, Geichman watches the pigments as they drip and pool, as they crack and dry, studies the stabilized formations, sifts through piles of dried paint skins, contemplates potential arrangements, sensitive to the engineered accident that is inexpressibly right, that resonates with a life-long private meditation. This is not a philosophy translated or rendered in paint, but something otherwise inarticulable, a meditation focused and filtered and lived through a life as a painter.