

Since 1980 there has been a growing number of younger artists who can be characterized as modern traditionalists. Although they are traditionalists in their conception of the picture plane as a window through which we view the artist's vision of the world, the imagery they employ is distinctly modern. Claire Seidl is one of the artists at the forefront of this recent tendency; her work can be said to share some of the same concerns as those of Shelley Kaplan, Michael Kessler, and Nick Maffei. Over the last four or five years she has evolved an emblematic vocabulary in which the shapes shift between the factual and the symbolic. Rather than deriving her vocabulary from the observation of nature, as she did in the earliest paintings of this period, she has started shifting her attention to the forces continually in motion beneath the crust of appearances.

Seidl employs two and sometimes three large shapes across the picture plane. These images recall whirlpools, twisting branches, claustrophobic undergrowth, spiky wing-like leaves, and flat stones tapering into jagged crowns. Counterpointing these large shapes are smaller, echoing shapes, swirling bands, and writhing lines. Spatial perspective is suggested through color intensity and compositional design. For the most part the oil paint is thick and viscous, as if it was extracted from a pool of brightly colored lava. By applying the paint with a wide assortment of brushes and palette knives, Seidl is able to confront the viewer with a large ensemble of painterly effects. The underlying emphasis is on motion. It is not unusual for her to weave a force field of stinging color out of tight, abraded strokes. Made up of looping braids, creamily seductive passages, and dense webs, the surface is tactile and aggressive, sensual and remote.

Like an increasing number of artists of her generation, Seidl wants to recover what was largely lost or ignored in the decade after Pollock's death. She not only tries to transform her natural gestures into shapes and lines, but she attempts to reach the primordial realm upon which all our perceptions are based. The impact of her painting rests precisely on the ability to bridge the gap between both



Claire Seidl, *Moose Calls*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 46 x 42". Courtesy Stephen Rosenberg Gallery.

CLAIRE SEIDL

bodily movement and the painting as a container, and a growing repertoire of gestures and the surface's ability to record the seismographic shocks. Her shift in attention suggests that she not only knows what she is after, but is clearly in the position to build upon what she has already accomplished, as well as enlarge the possibilities of what her paintings can encompass.

In the recent painting *Moose Calls*, a blue heart-like shape lies on its side at the bottom. Paralleling its curving left-hand edge is a wide reddish band, while thick greenish branches or aortas seem to be growing back

into the right side. The centrifugal force of the blue shape both pushes out and is held in check. An explosive power is offset but not denied, so that the viewer senses something smoldering beneath the vibrant stalemé. Whereas *Moose Calls* conveys few vestiges of the natural world, some of Seidl's other paintings still contain a horizon line and the suggestion of a sky. It is the one problem I have with some of her work and a small one at that. Until she convincingly resolves her use of a horizon line, she will be prevented from fully exploiting the possibilities inherent in the

evolution of a personal, inner vision.

One can argue that Seidl has developed out of a personal tradition that includes the lucid inner world of Arthur Dove and the frenzied empathy that possessed Chaim Soutine. By addressing the invisible forces governing nature, Seidl connects the act of painting with the continual growth, change, and destruction that is the basis of the universe. Macrocosm and microcosm are made to interpenetrate each other in an emotionally convincing way. It is rare to find a young artist who not only speaks with authority, but is so clearly going somewhere. I look forward to more and stronger paintings from her in the years to come. (Stephen Rosenberg, *October 23-November 27*)

John Yau