

CLAIRE SEIDL AT ROSENBERG + KAUFMAN FINE ART

Stephen Maine - 2004

Art in America

CLAIRE SEIDL

An idiosyncratic, emotionally authentic response to the limitless pictorial possibilities afforded by the sensory environment distinguishes early American Modernism, and Claire Seidl's work is squarely in this tradition. Her antecedents are Marin, Hartley and especially Dove, whose experiments in abstraction seemed to pursue the essential image, some symbol of the animate forces lying behind the visual experience of nature. In contrast, Seidl's paintings, with their blunted contours, blending chroma and reticulate brushwork, are all about flux, imminence, and the mutating visual field.

A dozen paintings recently on view varied widely in size, palette, and touch, and the concomitant bell curve of interest results from each painting's development according to its own set of contingencies, taking on its own set of risks. If *Array* (36" x 32", 2001) with its expansive upper region, advancing foreground and cove-like central mass of scraped and brushed deep greens and blues is the most obviously landscape-derived of these paintings, the mysterious and very beautiful *Dark Horse* (38" x 46", 2002) defies a quick scan. Brushy veils of runny blue- and purple-black glazes forming the lumbering, shadowy dominant shape go soft around the edges where they meet up with a flurrying yellowish ground. Fluttering movement is suggested, but recognition of the particular space carved out by this improvisation remains out of reach. Blurring has the effect not of generalizing the image but of making the expression of sensation a more specific and familiar breed of confusion.

The dry, scraped shards of warm black suspended in a pale field in *World of Good* (44 x 72", 2003), the one painting in the show featuring a distinctly matte surface, ironically evokes the action of waves. More often, surfaces are glossy, even sticky-looking, and unafraid of looking unpretty. The radical wiping-out of *Let Up* (42" x 36", 2003) is reminiscent of Bill Jenson's use of the same technique: the painting has not been abandoned so much as left the hell alone.

As a photographer, Seidl channels Albert Pinkham Ryder. The apparitional quality present in the paintings is even stronger in the nine photographs on view, as in the filigree of tree branches against silvery moonlit water in *Stairway* (2002). There's plenty of recognizable imagery to do with a wooded lakeside property and the people who gather there, but the massing of ghostly pale forms and streaking linear elements on dusky or velvety black grounds makes them nocturnal counterparts to the paintings' afternoon haze.

The photographs are nearly uniform in size, around fifteen inches square. Of them, *Studio* (2003) is the standout. A pair of vertical rectangles is lost in space among the shadow and glare of tree limbs and night-lights. They are windows, glowing white in the night, through which may be glimpsed the hardware of that most elusive of pursuits, the task at hand.