

EXHIBITION ESSAY

Kristen Fredrickson - 2003
Kristen Frederickson Contemporary Art

CLAIRE SEIDL

Claire Seidl has been an abstract painter for 25 years and a photographer for five. Her work in both paint and photography hovers in a space between the abstract and the referential. Never strictly representational, her work is nonetheless suggestive: of the figure, of the landscape, of emotive relationships among colors and shapes. Layering operates in both the paintings and photographs as a way to evoke motion and memory, suggesting what was visible in a given moment, in the next moment, over the passage of time. Seidl invests her surfaces with gestures made of line, form and color. There is a haunting quality to these works that is derived from the impulse to see beneath the surface and to understand the patterns in spite of their abstraction. Importantly, the paintings and photographs are grounded by (but not limited by) two related subjects: the Maine landscape where Seidl has spent much time, and her children whose forms both inhabit and escape from the imagery.

claireseidl.com

While these subjects do not define the work, their presence gives rise to much of the emotional content that asserts its presence and insists on the viewer stopping, slowing down, spending more time before the image. There is an impulse as well to look from painting to photograph and back again, choosing pairs, seeing relationships, choosing other pairs and connecting line, gesture and emotional qualities.

To look at Claire Seidl's work is to resist the speed and crowding of modern life in favor of a space where contemplation, memory and human emotion are not only possible but mandatory. These paintings and photographs embody many seemingly contradictory qualities: sound and silence, communication and withdrawal, strength and softness. As well, Seidl refuses the direct route to her goals of expression. She insists on shooting her photographs as reflections, or through materials that impede a simple view of her subject. The specificity of her subjects is belied by the complexity of her methods and the emotive content of the finished image.