

VERSED IN TWO MEDIUMS SEIDL IMPARTS BEAUTY, FORTITUDE

Mario Naves - 2004
The New York Observer

CLAIRE SEIDL

Rosenberg + Kaufman Fine Art is asking for trouble. In pairing the paintings and photographs of Claire Seidl, the gallery can't help but prompt the viewer to compare and contrast the artist's efforts in both mediums. That's the point, I know, but it seems risky all the same, particularly for an abstract painter who has been exhibiting for almost thirty years. Writing in the catalogue, the critic Karen Wilkin notes that "Seidl has kept her activities as painter and photographer parallel, but essentially separate."

Learning that Ms. Seidl has only recently taken up photography is likely to color our response to the work. Does the medium answer a need that painting has proven itself incapable of fulfilling? Or is it that Ms. Seidl isn't capable of realizing that need with oil paint? Alarm bells should go off when someone applies the word "diversity" to an artist's technique, as the gallery does in its press release. More often than not, it signals an inability to focus energy and skill on the aesthetic requirements posed by a single medium.

claireseidl.com

Ms. Wilkin accurately divines in both mediums "the same obsession with the permutations of the act of looking, with perception itself". Yet there's a significant difference in how deeply Ms. Seidl engages with each art form. Nature informs the paintings, whose layered, improvisatory approach follows in the tradition of the New York School. The mysteries of light and space, channeled through scenes of domesticity and leisure, define the photographs.

Studio and Clothesline (Quilts), (both 2003), photos whose beauty is unquestionable, are probably the most authoritative things Ms. Seidl has ever put her name to. What they can't claim is the fortitude that courses through canvases like Landlocked (2003), with its tender and fleeting geometry, or the field of exclamatory brushstrokes that is World of Good (2003). Ms. Seidl demands more of herself as an artist when she eschews the familiar, picks up a brush and heads for places unknown. Photography gives her pleasure; oil paint makes her live. The distinction is illuminated by Rosenberg + Kaufman's well-placed gamble.