

Art in America

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Claire Seidl at Stephen Rosenberg

Over the last three or four years, while remaining loyal to the idiom of gestural abstraction, Claire Seidl has gone through at least three distinct shifts of imagery. She began by bunching little flamelike marks together on small canvases to create wounded-looking abstract shapes. Their vulnerability derived from their suggestion of transitory natural phenomena: flame, wind, water, even peeling bark. As Seidl expanded her formats, however, the pictures gained heart. In her last show she laid claim to the celebrational aspect of landscape-oriented abstraction and made a place for herself as a leading member of the generation that, coming along after George Peck, Bill Jensen, Katherine Porter and Gregory Amenoff, is remaking the iconography of "natural" modernism yet again.

Now she's furthering her wide-open gestural painting—drawing, really—while earlier references to trees, whirlpools, wind and water have been supplanted by a consideration of their underlying geometries. She is also exploring the formal possibilities of nonallusive color. This is consequently her most "abstract" work to date. Though still invoking art-histori-



Claire Seidl: *The Eye of the Realist Is Inflatable*, 1986, oil on canvas, 51 by 84 inches; at Stephen Rosenberg (review on p. 135)

cal precedents, she has with this show moved to reconsideration of the Surrealist-inspired automatism to which Picasso and Gorky brought such painterly vigor. Seidl's resurrection of that heroic moment is partly nostalgic, but her best paintings are fresh and powerful, suggesting that she's less engaged in an exhumation than a reawakening.

The more recent works, in which Seidl incorporates some outline to accent and contend with shapes, avoid the loss of formal tension that characterizes some small, slightly earlier paintings with uniformly soft edges. The centerpiece of her show, however, was *The Eye of the Realist Is Inflatable*, a big horizontal canvas in which the formal elements swing with a

resolve that lives up to the jazzy title.

A big-brush, high-velocity affair in bungalow pastels, the painting draws you along with a wiggly black line looping up the left side, across the top and down the right, where it twists around into a pink highlighted box just above another spiky gestural burst. The gestural timing at work here is wonderful. Movement is less compositionally directed in the vertically oriented *The Ghost's Eye Is Green*. Here the shapes tend to hover like exotic fish in a tank, but they are strikingly inventive, and the colors range more dynamically between light and dark. Both paintings are dated 1986, suggesting Seidl is just hitting her stride.

—Stephen Westfall