

Art in America

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Claire Seidl at Rosenberg + Kaufman

Claire Seidl's recent show was characterized by the translucency and fluidity of both her paintings and watercolors, so much so that the two mediums seemed almost interchangeable. Another characteristic was the frequent appearance of the color green, in shades that ranged from the wistful and lyrical to the puckered and sour.

Seidl, who has been painting for over 20 years, has always been a straightforward, full-orchestration abstractionist. She plays brushy and dry passages off against others that are lushly liquid, using strokes, splashes, drips and swirls with intelligence tempered by intuition. This combination forestalls both easy effects and academic dryness. Her scale is consistently small to moderate, and while there is no reason for her not to scale up, there is also no reason to do so; the impact is fine as is. Her layerings of pigment or watercolor make a loose web in which unexpected, complex vistas occur in a thicketlike construction.

As if to emphasize that these paintings are about looking and seeing, three paintings have "eye" in their title. *The Eye of the Glass Blower* is phosphorescent, luminous and polyphonic, while *The Eye of the Non-Combatant* is louvered and latticed, hedged in by wooded colors. *The Purse Stealer's Eye* has, appropriately, a patina like old gold. *Whereabouts* glimmered artificially green under the gallery light, touched with pink flesh tones, pale yellows, blues, whites and transparent browns; it seems a hybrid of de Kooning and Monet, a scribbled thatch of colors.

The watercolors *Description without Place (one)* and *(two)* are more autumnal in palette; their hues are lucid and immediately appealing, with a spill of

Claire Seidl: *The Eye of the Non-Combatant*, 1995-96, oil on linen, 64 by 82 inches; at Rosenberg + Kaufman.



light glinting through. In these works, while all of the surface is equally important and the edges do not fall away, there is still a center, an energy that pulses out from the midpoint like a heartbeat. A concealed horizon line emerges here and there, and landscape associations are unavoidable, yet these works remain outside of nature, situated in an imagined history of modernism that runs from, say, Mondrian to Pollock to Marden.

Not every painting was equally successful, but the ones that were—and they were the majority—showed to advantage Seidl's abiding strengths: her sureness of touch and scale, her sense of movement and color, the unforced grace of her execution, and her unwavering commitment to the abstract endeavor.

—Lilly Wei