

Lance Esplund

Modern Painters, Autumn 2001

Abstraction and Nature

Today's artists, in an attempt to be true to themselves, and to continue a dialogue with the wide range of art that is already out there, must struggle to find their own voices and to figure out where they fit in. Like many contemporary artists, Tricia

Wright makes work that conveys the desire to be endlessly open and, therefore, more inclusive, rather than to nail anything down too fast. Her abstract acrylic paintings straddle the fence between the synthetic and the organic, between

the attractive and the repellent. She works that fine line between seduction and cold shoulder. Looking at Wright's paintings, I felt my mind meandering between possibilities. Wright puts us in the vicinity of a specific range of subjects (maps, sex, sea life, birds) and counters it with a mechanical paint-handling. Her flat, often electric, often cosmetic, poster color, which always warms up at just the last moment, and her deliberately evocative-yet-vague forms keep us guessing.

Wright's paintings are sexy, tinged with sadistic overtones. It's as if she had imbued seaweed, comets and bubbles with human qualities, and trained them to flirt with us from the canvas. With acidic yellow-greens and chalky creams, colors that are never far from bodily fluids, she gives threatening, anthropomorphic qualities to seemingly innocuous shapes. In *Skin Picture* (2001) a fluttering eyelash, or tentacle, delicate and curled, extends from a combination of bloodshot eye and vaginal lips towards a phallus, which appears to both advance and retreat. The large field of mauve, in which all of the drama takes place, is mute, and refuses to give direction to the forms, or to yield to our questions. In *Two Boys* (2001), phalluses (or fingers) pressure down on yellow sleeves, entangled at the top and bottom of the composition by maroon curls. Here, the colors create a palpable piston-like vibration, held in tension against the plane.

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Wright's dialogue is between Pop Art and nature. She is reinventing the mass-produced smugness of Warhol under a botanist's microscope. A romantic at heart, Wright holds fast to nature as she filters everything through a commercial lens. There is a very controlled, silkscreened feel to her paint handling (she pours it slowly onto the canvas) that contradicts the freewheeling casualness of the forms themselves. At the same time, all these contradictions are what give the paintings their life. Part of the pleasure in viewing her work is finding yourself saying: "It's this and yet it's this -- and yet it's also this".

Lance Esplund lives in New York City. He is a critic for *Art in America*, and teaches at The Parsons School of Design.

Tricia Wright's paintings are included in the exhibition 'Art Transplant: British Artists in New York', 1-31 October 2001, the British Consul-General's Residence, New York. By appointment: 212 242 3050.

Her paintings can also be seen in the exhibition, 'Color Aid', November 7-December 15, Metaphor Contemporary Art, Brooklyn, New York. For information: www.metaphorcontemporaryart.com



Tricia Wright, *Two Boys*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 132 x 96.5 cm