

Art in America

February 2008

Susan Wanklyn at A.M. Richard

This veteran abstract painter has stuck closely to the exploration of half a dozen of painting's most basic attributes: facture, brushstroke, transparency, color, pattern and proportion. Susan Wanklyn's art can be interpreted in relation to individual handicraft. Her painting might be called Post-Minimalist lyricism and shares with the work of Brice Marden and Mary Heilmann an attention, alternately serious and loose, to the complexity of the painted surface.

Wanklyn's most recent exhibition, "Paintings in a Room," took place at A.M. Richard Fine Arts, a gallery in an upstairs Williamsburg apartment. The 10 paintings included were shown in three small rooms where paneling was evident beneath white paint. Many of the works were hung on flat spaces between detailed moldings. This aspect of the installation complemented rather than thwarted the sunny, playful paintings, which seemed to revel in the bright homeliness of the environment.

A typical Wanklyn painting's hard, milky surface is brusquely caressed by wide, flat brushstrokes. She prefers medium-sized wood panels (around 2½ by 3 feet) that are as often vertical as horizontal. Wanklyn's medium is homemade casein. On first glance one notes a sweet embrace of the decorative. Further scrutiny reveals a counterpoint of abruptly overlapping and interpenetrating fields, created in part with stencils.

For example, *Irrational Exuberance* (all paintings 2006 or '07) began with a loose regiment of about a dozen oblongs in wetly applied, transparent shades

of lilac, lipstick red, chartreuse and saffron, all collected in a central area. Next, two adjacent squares of paper, one large and the other smaller, were placed on the painting. Then Wanklyn quickly brushed a large rectangle of vine black paint over most of the work's surface, keeping away from the edges. Last, the squares of paper were removed, while the black paint was still wet, leaving a scrimlike frame of melting brushstrokes around the multicolored tesserae.

In addition to the haptic and retinal pleasure it afforded, *Irrational Exuberance*, like all the works here, demonstrated how well the tools of painterly abstraction can still be utilized. At a time when countless outsized ambitions seem intent upon crushing painting's subtle complications, Wanklyn's works seem like dependable bicycles parked among the Hummers.

—Joe Fyfe

View of Susan Wanklyn's exhibition "Paintings in a Room," 2007, showing four casein-on-panel works, all 2007; at A.M. Richard.

