

CHEIM & READ

Studio and Garden

by Altoon Sultan

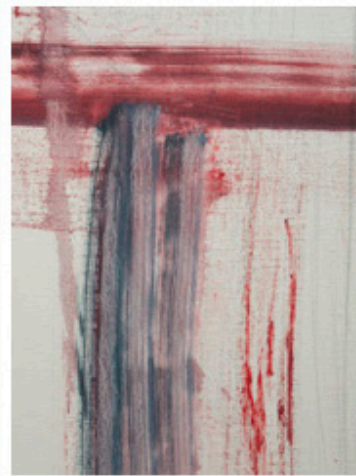
November 16, 2015

Louise Fishman and Josh Smith: Complexity and Simplicity; Sensibility



Louise Fishman, *Easy Living*, 2014; oil on linen, 64 x 34 in.

We can't help but bring our taste and our sensibility along with us when we look at art. Many years ago, my teacher Philip Pearlstein noted that I had an "architectonic sensibility", and my desire for clarity and order guide my taste. It is therefore not surprising that my favorite paintings in [Louise Fishman's exhibition at Cheim & Read](#) were those with the most spare compositions. I admire Fishman tremendously--her continuing muscular explorations of painting are inspiring--but I don't always love all her paintings. I *do* love *Easy Living*: there is tremendous energy contained in a very taut structure. The speed of the brushstrokes is in tension with their clear spacial description.



Louise Fishman, *Easy Living* detail

547 WEST 25 STREET NEW YORK NY 10001 TEL 212 242 7727

FAX 212 242 7737 GALLERY@CHEIMREAD.COM

This kind of painterly immediacy, with its accidental flows, can only be harnessed successfully and repeatedly by a painter who has been working seriously for many years.



Louise Fishman watercolors

Some of my other great favorites at the Fishman show were a group of small watercolors, painted over the past few years.



Louise Fishman, *Untitled*, 2011; watercolor on paper, 6 x 9 in.



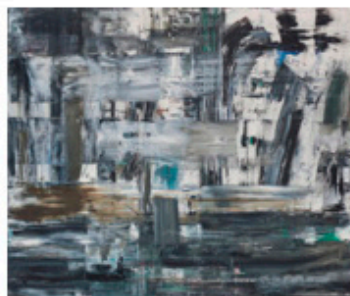
Louise Fishman, *Untitled*, 2013; watercolor on paper, 9 7/8 x 4 in.

They are full of air and light, and are succinct in their form.



Louise Fishman, *Living Forward*, 2014; oil on linen, 66 x 39 in.

Living Forward is powerful with its three massive vertical forms, interrupted by canvas canyons, and startled by a thin orange line.



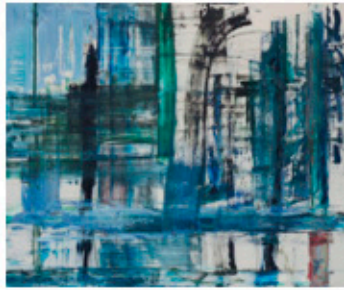
Louise Fishman, *Sven Jesper*, 2015; oil on linen, 74 x 88 in.

My favorite among the larger horizontal paintings was *Sven Jesper*; its heavier bands of blackish-grays at the bottom anchor the more complex spaces above. The strokes of lighter paint pop up to the picture plane, allowing the area on the right, with its bare canvas, to settle back. There are tough barriers to entry, but we can find our way into the space.



Louise Fishman, *Bel Canto*, 2014; oil on linen, 74 x 88 in.

When it came to some of the other paintings, such as *Bel Canto*....



Louise Fishman, *Credo*, 2015; oil on linen, 72 x 88 in.

....and *Credo*, I couldn't find my way in amid the welter of rushing colors and marks. My orderly sensibility wanted to go back to the spareness of *Easy Living*, a painting that seems reticent alongside these others. But, a funny thing has happened as I've been processing these photos: I like the paintings more and more. Of course I'm now seeing them in a small size, with the paint flattened out, with the energy of the actual work dissipated on the computer screen, but it has allowed me to see the structure more clearly and not be overwhelmed by the paintings' complexity. I wish I could see this show again.



Josh Smith, *Untitled*, 2014; rabbit skin glue, calcium carbonate, white pigment, ink, watercolor, graphite, grease pencil, and paint pen on panel; 32 x 26 x 2 1/2 in.

The visual experience couldn't have been more different around the corner at the Josh Smith exhibition "[Sculpture](#)" at [Luhring Augustine](#) (this show is over). On mid-sized gessoed panels were minimal marks, made with various painting and drawing tools. I felt pleasure in seeing the off-hand marks, their casualness, on the open white ground. They reminded me of Richard Tuttle's work, especially some of his most spare watercolors.



Detail of the above

The gesso of the panels--made with rabbit skin glue and calcium carbonate, a true gesso--was full of cracks, probably because of being prepared incorrectly. Smith used this occurrence as a strange conceit, calling the show "[Sculpture](#)"; [he said](#) "You could call them paintings, but they're not paintings. They're sculptures. They have to be sculptures." It's a very odd thing to say, though I suppose it's not any stranger than Frank Stella calling his huge 3 dimensional works "paintings".



Josh Smith, *Untitled*, 2014; rabbit skin glue, calcium carbonate, white pigment, ink, watercolor, grease pencil, and paint pen on panel; 50 1/2 x 38 1/2 x 2 1/2 in.

I liked some of these works very much: they satisfied my sensibility. The balance of line and emptiness felt right.



Josh Smith, *Untitled*, 2014; rabbit skin glue, calcium carbonate, white pigment, graphite, grease pencil, and paint pen on panel; 32 x 26 x 2 1/2 in.

In the work above, the single line moving erratically down the surface has a poetic relationship to the lines of the cracked gesso.



For me there's something touching, almost poignant, about these thin wavering lines, as though they are beings uncertain of their place in the world. From what I've seen, though, of Josh Smith's other work, this body of work is a quirk, probably the only work of his I'll ever like; I certainly don't like what came before this. I know I will continue to admire Louise Fishman's work, but doubt I'll feel the same about Josh Smith's.....(but you never know; I've been surprised before)....