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ARTnews

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Louise Fishman

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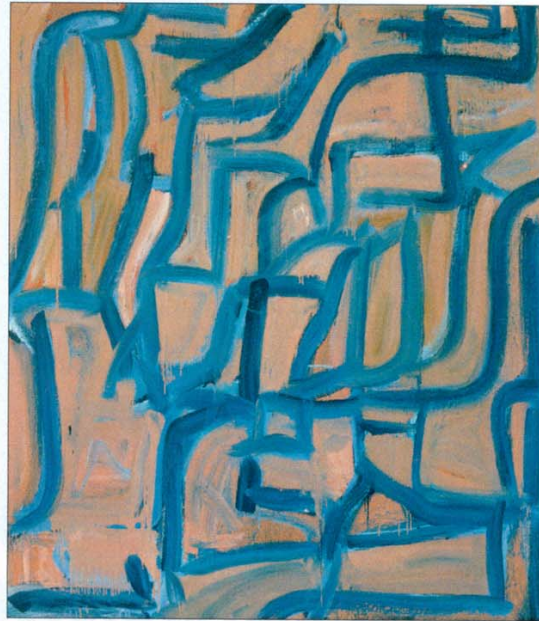
Louise Fishman's latest paintings struck a hard-won balance: they were big, heroic, Abstract Expressionist canvases that held not a trace of nostalgia for the good old days or the good old boys.

Fishman accomplishes this high-wire act by letting us in on the process. Any successful painting is only a few smart moves away from a muddled mess, and Fishman keeps that drama on the surface—her compositions are a full-disclosure record of the hair-raising chances she takes with line and color. *Green Apogee* (2005) should not work at all. Its smudgy wet-in-wet lines jab and swirl inconclusively, like highway overpasses left unfinished in midair. There is nothing pretty or harmonious in the painting's combination of phthalo green, cloudy blues, and dull maroon. For viewers, there is a moment of uncertainty: can she pull it off? But she does. At first impression, *The Art of Losing* (2003) seems too simple—just a gnarled black maze hastily filled in with translucent blue-white—but seconds later it snaps into focus, coalescing into a crisp, spacious composition that glows like stained glass.

Locating Fishman's work in mainstream contemporary art is a challenge—she has carved out a rather solitary place for herself. The loopy calligraphy of paintings like *Pink and Blue and You* (2003) suggests an alliance with the work of Brice Marden, but the resemblance is superficial. Fishman is the anti-Marden: where Marden's flowing lines are contemplative and transcendent, Fishman's brushstrokes are willful and explosive.

It's not necessary to know about Fishman's activist politics to sense that she is not content with the state of the world. These paintings are emblems of resistance, both in and out of the studio.

—Rex Weil



Louise Fishman, *Pink and Blue and You*, 2003, oil on linen, 80" x 70".
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