

OCTOBER 19-25, 2006 ISSUE 577
ART REVIEWS, Page 97



Olav Christopher Jenssen

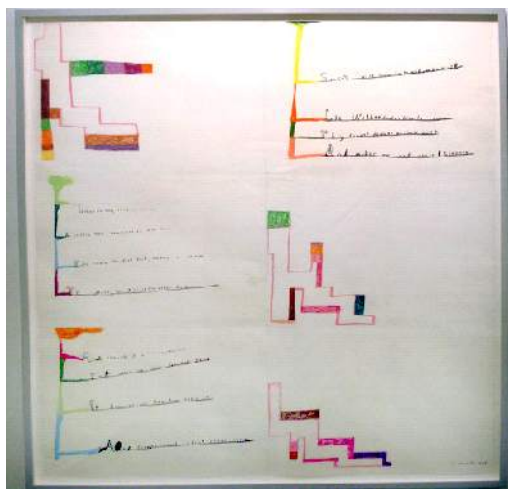
Tracy Williams, Ltd, through Oct 28

(see Chelsea)

For his second solo show in New York, Norwegian-born, Berlin-based Olav Christopher Jenssen presents the third installment of his lyrically paradoxical "Empty Drawing Room" series that he began in 1999. A cycle of small canvases lines the walls of the gallery's garden-level space, with large, framed works on paper, several incorporating text, installed upstairs.

While Jenssen's gestural brushwork inevitably invokes Abstract Expressionism, his inventive works are in no way indebted to history. Fresh, fast, almost cavalier mark-making balances carefully constructed, finely worked surfaces. Challenging in their raw appearance, with large swaths of white background left bare, the intimately scaled paintings are also very pleasurable to look at.

In the pastel and crayon drawings in the upper galleries, repeated ovals in lime green, pink and orange share space with excerpts from poems by T.S. Eliot (*The Waste Land*) and John Donne ("A Valediction: Forbidding



Mourning"). Certain texts are jostled to suggest a connection between English and Jenssen's native Norwegian. A similar linguistic link is conjured by *Appendix: Third Section of the Empty Drawing Room* by using a section of Spanish text the artist retrieved from a catalog by Danish painter Per Kirkeby.

The success of the show might come down to the magnetic tensions in Jenssen's work, which balances visual rhapsody with formal rigor, intuition with history, and risk-taking with structure. Maybe Jenssen's early career as an Olympic ski jumper has something to do with it.—Adam E. Mendelsohn