



5/18/2005

Against Interpretation
by Charlie Finch

We appropriate Susan Sontag's famous formulation of anti-criticism to describe the hunger for pure painting in a world of young self-regarding, hypereducated artistes who splice and dice their personal backstories and trivial learning into evermore insignificant creations.

Thankfully, two new shows satisfy that hunger, Malcolm Morley at Sperone Westwater and Judy Ledgerwood at Tracy Williams. How liberating, in the case of Mr. Morley, to see sports imagery in a prominent gallery! Morley's richly hued paintings, meticulously reconstructed from magazine photographs on an especially tiny grid, show us Sammy Sosa striking out and two cowboys, of the Dallas variety, bringing down a buccaneer, from Tampa Bay.



Judy Ledgerwood, *Green Goddess*, 2004, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 50 x 60 inches

We remember the heady tonic we felt way back in the early 1970s upon first gazing at Malcolm's astonishing paintings of decorative bank checks -- the artist's will to transform the mundane into a beautiful spectacle for future eyes, no explication required.

Well, folks, Malcolm's done it again. In these protean new paintings, he's in the middle of conflict and crashes, car accidents and horse races, the rapid bumping togetherness of postmodern life. And the colors are as gorgeous as anything blooming in Central Park.

For the first time in years, Morley looked especially fit and trim alighting from a limousine, with a pearl-handled cane and his elegant spouse as accessories to his triumph. Malcolm had the aura of a winning athlete. As we told Oklahoma painter John Newsom, all that's missing in the show is bronco busting and a rodeo.

It's just a short jaunt from Sperone to Tracy Williams' townhouse on West 4th Street, where Judy Ledgerwood's also gorgeous show is in residence.

Ms. Ledgerwood, as elegantly Midwestern in a revealing cotton dress as Mr. Morley is a bohemian Brit, so beguiled Lawrence Weiner, dressed in a scarlet leather motorcycle jacket, that he knocked a vase of flowers all over Tracy Williams' desk.



Judy Ledgerwood, *Spring Rain*, 2005, Oil on canvas, 84 x 144 inches

Fortunately, Tracy's aplomb matches a consistent esthetic which envelopes her stable of artists in nothing more nor less than pure beauty.

It's possible for a collector to simply pick one piece from each of Tracy's artists to enforce a coherent, wordless vision that totally satisfies, and it's best to begin with Judy Ledgerwood.

These are paintings so lush in gold, pink, blue and cadmium reds that they ripple beyond the picture plane and the walls into Tracy's backyard garden. They combine the giddy dumbness of Warhol's flowers with the majestic formalism of Judd's specific objects, no interpretation needed.

During the opening, Ms. Ledgerwood described herself and her work as "Brice Marden with balls," at which point she spilled her drink all over that slip of a cotton dress.

"Brice's balls just slapped you," we laughed.

Judy giggled with pleasure, and pure pleasure, like soft skin rolling over in a warm bed, is what her work will give you.

For the balls, visit Malcolm Morley.

Malcolm Morley, "The Art of Oil Painting," May 5-June 25, 2005, at Sperone Westwater,
415 West 13th Street, New York, N.Y. 10014.

Judy Ledgerwood, "Spring Fever," May 5-June 24, 2005, at Tracy Williams, Ltd.,
313 bis West 4th Street, New York, N.Y. 10014.

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