



## Abstract Spaces

By: STEPHEN MUELLER

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Abstract Mitchell-Innes & Nash Gallery 534 W. 26th St. Tue.-Sat. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Through Jan. 6 212-744-7400

Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery in Chelsea has a most compelling group show until January 6. The show includes five painters all of whom work in the abstract, and is a virtual compendium of all the ways abstract painters can work today. Like much figurative work that depends on the notion of collage, these abstract painters traffic in the unexpected combination of elements, choice of materials, or pictorial spaces.

What makes new abstract painting new seems to be a nod to the notion of space-illusionistic or accidental-in abstract work. Acknowledging space in abstract work was strictly forbidden during the heyday of "high modernism." All of these artists, however, not only use and confound notions of space; they also use any technical trope that seems suitable for their purposes.

The collage mentality is most obvious in the work of Alison Fox whose paintings cut in from all modes and places. What seems to make sense is always interplayed with elements from another world of color or another viewpoint. This is a sort of cubist game, but the paintings resolve themselves in a generally familiar and coherent manner.

Rebecca Morris, perhaps the most experienced painter here has two large works in the show, both untitled. One, "untitled 2006," is a quilt-like affair. The stately "untitled 2005" is a close-to-symmetrical painting. Brevity and restraint serve this beautiful canvas well. Morris' paint handling is simple and direct allowing consecutive layers to create new coloration and further divide and complicate the picture plane. Her color is calm and toward the natural.

Alex Kwartler's work has photographic qualities like those chemical geniuses that manipulate things in the darkroom to simulate painting. Both of his pieces are dark, one with a bent spectrum-like V form on black, the other all dark with a mandala halo of violet and brownish.

Chris Martin's ludic abstractions are likely to be familiar to many people as they are regulars on the abstract group show circuit; Martin's tantraesque pictures are lumpy and bright and often have the look of art that is useful either as a science project or as a meditative device. His "In Memory of Al Held" is a deep yellow and black experiment in atomic or structural systems and refers amusingly to Al Held's baffling ambiguous space.

The three small paintings of Phillip Allen are especially transcendent. Using thick bands of paint at the top and bottom and thin bands in the middle Allen plays with the idea of landscape. Quirky drawing makes space jump from microscopic to vast. His painting "Slives" has the quality of being about very small and very big space at the same time, with a little apocalyptic feel and an odd combination of romantic poetry and big science.

This show speaks very well for new abstract painting and is a welcome relief from the glut of willfully childish, mechanical, and/or tired irony about the galleries lately.



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