

cut for original for booklet

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Janet Fish at Borgenicht

Janet Fish's lavish still lifes propose a sort of hedonist sublime. For all the complexities of their gorgeous dishevelment there is never any technical strain or slowing the pace to wrestle some intractable optical phenomenon into painterly form. Rumpled pink satin is seen through a curvy, yellow-tinted glass bowl and light projects through that bowl onto the cloth; a patterned blue-and-ocher material is seen through a green-tinted water pitcher which also reflects a yellow wrapper. Working at a scale often three or four times life-size, she notates a multiplicity of optical effects with a fluent, improvisatory performance that makes it all look easy.

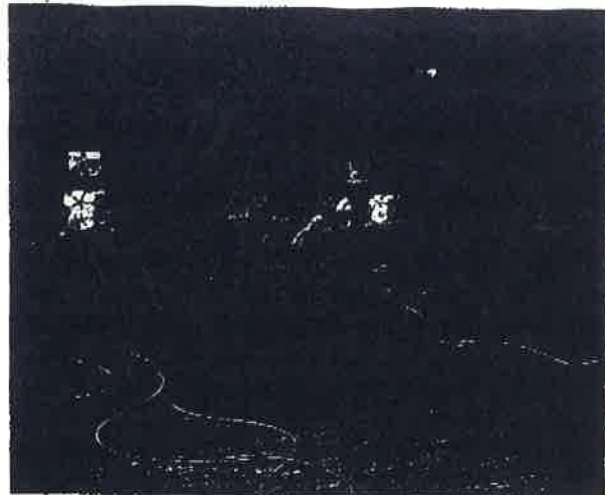
More than most realists, Fish makes us aware of the abstraction implicit in painterly representation. Seen up close, from the painter's-arm's-length viewpoint, many passages dissolve into rhythmic antics, seemingly nonreferential plays of high-keyed color. It is not farfetched to see here a relation to Chuck Close's colossal portraits, composed as they are of bright, inventive micro-abstractions, although the conceptual premise of Close's grid would be altogether foreign to Fish's sensibility.

Janet Fish: *Three Vases, Three Bowls*, 1994, oil on canvas, 50 inches square; at Borgenicht.



Always her essential subject is light. Whatever is reflective, refractive, translucent, pearlescent or otherwise transformed by light attracts her attention. This predilection leads her to luxuriant subject matter: precious crystal bowls, elegant vases, freshly cut flowers. But she is also, with impartial affection, drawn to blue plastic bags from the supermarket, bright yellow candy wrappers, even red Gummi Bears.

Now and then implications of a darker content belie the general insouciance: an ominous silhouetted figure is seen in a neighboring loft through a window beyond a still life with a broken glass bowl; in another work, a withdrawn-looking woman breaks the festive mood of a tulip-bedecked dinner table as a jovial man smiles heartily at someone outside the painting. Paradoxically, such anecdotal, narrative themes restrict, rather than expand, the meaning of the paintings. In part this is a technical issue: although Fish often handles the figure superbly, it does not engage her strongest painterly impulses. Her psychological motivation—perhaps the key to the problem—is not always apparent. In her still lifes Fish manages to express a full range of precisely nuanced feelings. Even if these emotions are not in any obvious way about life outside of the pictures themselves, they are implicit in her



Matthew McCaslin: *Bloomer*, 1995, video installation with audio, dimensions variable; at Michael Klein.

pictorial structures and particularly in her palette. In this sense she carries on the modernist/formalist tradition even while achieving increasingly commanding and lifelike representations of the visible world.

—Robert Berling

Matthew McCaslin at Michael Klein

Matthew McCaslin's installation, *Bloomer*, a true garden of technological delights, was so exuberant in its use of wires and electronic gadgets that it was difficult to tell whether the artist is unabashedly protechnology, or, as the extremes of artificiality employed in the installation sometimes seemed to hint, rather wary.

The show consisted of 14 large video monitors scattered throughout the gallery, some single, some paired, others stacked in a pyramid. Their screens displayed several unsynchronized versions of the same videotape: gaudy "stock" timelapse footage of flowers bursting into bloom. Flowerlike clusters of bright yellow worklights suspended from the ceiling and lying on the floor resembled artificial blossoms. Adding to the mocking replication of nature were yards of flexible metal conduit—looped over ceiling pipes and coiled upon the floor—to which the monitors were connected like gourds on a vine. The resulting profusion of color and movement gave the impression of

hothouse fecundity and ed-up natural processes

The artist takes delight in manipulating shelf hardware in unobvious, subversive ways. Yet the quality—*Bloomer* had a quality—for example, that appeared to be put with electronic steroids, and here my own tech may be showing, the in stirred primal fears of a created by man rather God.

A piece concurrently (along with work by Ganahl) at Sandra Gallery supported this notion. In *Breakdown Cele* tape deck and speaker placed on a blinding red 4-foot fluorescent lights an 8-foot row on the f tape deck continuous: the audio portion of it from Stanley Kubrick's *Space Odyssey* in v astronaut disconnects t of the renegade compt before it can destr McCaslin seems to an "brave new world" wh senses will be so sec machine pleasures that no longer recognize t ence between the arti the real. —Peter von

Joanna Pousette at Tenri

Pairs of eccentrically canvases and fluid, brushstrokes are the essence of