

young, accomplished master painter such as Yu Peng, whose work is just entering the international arena, and join him in his new visual universe heretofore uncharted? —Robert Kushner

Janet Fish at D.C. Moore

Janet Fish's paintings have long shown an affinity with Dutch 17th-century painting, not only in her emphasis on still life but also in the comfort she seems to feel in working in an established format, reflecting an accustomed way of thinking about the world. Fish's paintings give the viewer an impression of being seated in front of a table spread with enticing (and occasionally daunting) finery. The sense of abundance is heightened by the exotic objects she arranges, the bright colors she uses and her bravura paint handling.

This exhibition of 17 moderate-size oils and two watercolors (all 1996-97) revealed Fish to be furthering her technical painting effects, in particular, her treatments of reflections and distortions in glass. She infuses Baroque energy into every surface by a barrage of active strokes. Fish plots the variables not only of specific objects but of their setting (indoors or outdoors), light (midday, late afternoon, evening) and color harmonies.

In almost every work, she plays foreground—an angled surface illusionistically distinct from the canvas surface—against background. Sometimes all we see of the distance is a glimpse of greenery through a window. Sometimes whole scenes are shown behind the table at which the viewer "sits." *Ocean* presents a table by the seashore (rocks and crashing foam can be made out). As is often the case, the table is cropped by the lower edges of the canvas. It is set with a lunch of crabs, fish and oysters, ready to be cooked. Everything is rendered in detail—the print on the newspaper in which the catch came, the ocean in the background, variegated oyster shells, a crumpled green plastic bag. The precise point at which Fish abandons detail for a slight abstraction of form is the point at which the painting coheres.

Up In Smoke, the largest canvas in the exhibition, exploits background/foreground tension with a

broad view of 16 children running from all directions to join two boys. Complementing this human drama is a lavishly painted tableau in the lower portion of the canvas—an Independence Day spread of salad, potato chips, soda, strawberries in a plastic bag and frosted cupcakes topped with red, white and blue jimmies.

The wide-angled perspective of this work recalls the extreme breadth of Rackstraw Downes's landscapes, while a streetcorner glimpsed from above in the background of *Iron Tea Kettle* reminds one of Yvonne Jacquette's urban aerial views. All three painters fill traditional genres with a powerful sense of contemporaneity.

—Vincent Katz

Lisa Ruyter at Mitchell Algus and Kenny Schachter/Rove

Lisa Ruyter's new works put a perversely original spin on the landscape tradition by employing the removed, deliberately posterlike painting style she has developed over the past several years to depict nondescript American suburbs. In earlier work Ruyter used multiple scales and perspectives, disjunctive imagery and glamorous figures to create paintings that had the surreal sense of montaged film advertisements—a star's disembodied face hovering over a devastated landscape, perhaps. Her new images are based on the one-point perspective of her own snapshots. Although I might have thought the results would be less involving, they are the most resonant of her career.

Ruyter's technique is direct—black, chunkily drawn outlines with filled-in areas of bright colors. While the lines resemble the type of drawing produced by primitive computer paintbox programs, they nevertheless retain a hand-drawn, somewhat overcaffeinated jittery feel. The flat areas of color range from decorator pastels to acidic hues, and are deployed in the nonnaturalistic mode Hollywood uses to indicate a hallucinatory inter-



Janet Fish: *Up in Smoke*, 1997, oil on canvas, 55 by 131 1/2 inches; at D.C. Moore.

For instance, in *Wuthering Heights*, two empty phone booths stand side by side in front of a small-town store. The booths and the store's facade have a lemon-yellow glow, and the panes of glass in the store window are a uniform blue. In *The Way of the Stars*, a crane's teeth dig into construction debris while two men chat in the foreground. The sky is a powder-pink field, and only one man's hard hat is the yellow it would be in real life. The paintings manage a strange trick: they are engagingly lurid without conspicuous affectation.

That all the paintings are titled after films gives us some indication of Ruyter's intention. She has hybridized her painterly role with that of a film director, imbuing the ordinary locations she paints with drama. This was clearest in the four paintings at Algus. While based on a sequence of almost identical photographs of a pond in Vermont, each work is cropped, colored, titled and oriented completely differently. The scene itself is pastoral—a couple strolls past the pond. We see a rowboat with crossed oars. Are

we being prepared for a romance or a murder? What foreshadowing has Ruyter given us? Can we use the titles, such as *The Getaway* or *Paris by Night*, to predict the next scene? It is a rare treat to see Ruyter wrap the landscape tradition and her knowledge of the history of movie "establishing shots" so intelligently and lovingly around each other.

—Bill Arning

José Gabriel Fernández at Lombard-Freid

Venezuelan artist José Gabriel Fernández's New York solo debut, "A Brief Illustrated Guide to Bullfighting," consisted of an elaborate multiroom series of installations. Incorporating the mediums of video, sculpture and watercolor, the show came across as a single, interconnected work.

Visitors first encountered *Anatomy of Fate*, a corner area covered with red, organic-patterned wallpaper designed by the artist. Hanging on the left wall was a bullfighter's jacket made of thin steel mesh decorated with red swirls identical to the wallpaper pattern. The

Lisa Ruyter: *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 40 by 48 inches; at Kenny Schachter/Rove.

