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GALLERIES



Ruptured spaces grope their way through an abstract darkness in works including "Citizen Secrecy," oil on canvas, 42 x 30 inches, by Michelle Mackey. *Courtesy of Paul Sharpe Gallery*

Calm Brutality

Investigative painter rides a fearless line between representation and abstraction

By ANDREW ROBINSON

A quiet storm brewed on the canvases of Michelle Mackey's recent exhibition "Spaces In Between" at Paul Sharpe Gallery in Chelsea.

The artist traces haunting shadows of representation with lush brushstrokes and spatters of bright color. Ruptured spaces grope their way through an abstract darkness, revealing an unforeseen path to memory or a momentary recognition of the here and now.

Mackey at her best rides a fearless line between representation and abstraction. Her canvases maintain a serious gaze and distance upon the elusive spaces and places she renders.

In the painting "Citizen Secrecy" there is a spatter of paint hovering above an earthbound edifice, which feels urban to its core. There is a calm brutality captured here. Mackey's guttural use of paint has equal parts Anselm Keifer, "Mad Max," and gentrified Brooklyn grit.

There were moments in this exhibition where Mackey's sanguine ethos stands strong. Her visual haiku adds inconspicuous details, which set in motion a large unfurling of painterly activity. And it is in these activated surfaces where this artist attempts to simultaneously obscure and reveal public and private secrets.

Mackey in her own words describes her visual stream of conscience where "sometimes we are securing freedom; sometimes we are securing illusions... Riding the line between abstraction and representation has always been a tension I've played with in my work. I think it's really the best way for me to take the familiar and turn it on its ear. I'm really trying to see more of what is there or what could be there... Climbing onto rooftops, scaling fire escapes, and crawling into the ditches of work-sites; I am always trying to reframe familiar environments, to restore focus and value to local space, which has been diminished by (the instant gratification of) cyberspace."

Like the narrative simultaneity of comic books and Trajan's "Column, Mackey attempts to capture living structures as a whole and in shambles upon the same visual field. Cinder blocks and housing projects hang in rich dripping fields of paint. This sense of multiplicity in time and place captures a contemporary and poetic sensibility, which offers a fine solitude from the storm of our loud and brash culture.