



Michelle Mackey *Built On A Section*, 2003, Oil on Canvas, 54 x 54 Inches, Courtesy: Paul Sharpe Contemporary Art, New York

**Michelle Mackey**  
Paul Sharpe Contemporary Art

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By MARY HRBACEK

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Michelle Mackey's new abstract paintings show an ease and effluence that is uncommon in painting today. They reveal a multitude of subtle surface incidents that originate in the cracks and fissures of sculptural relief segments. The paintings are relaxed, the antithesis of the muscular surfaces that often define nature-inspired, process-oriented art. Mackey sensitively guides "accidents" that contribute an element of surprise within the mysterious

serenity of the works. She pours and scrapes paint to produce a surface that suggests time, wear, and the process of weathering; embedding long insect-like forms beneath layers of a thick transparent medium.

Mackey's color choices are unusual and personal; she favors a spectrum of brown, green, and yellow hues that create quietly unusual color relationships. In *Certainly* (Oil on Canvas) 2003, she uses delicate shades of burnt sienna and a transparent gel medium to create undefined shapes that resemble cocoons or pod-like forms. In *What Happens* (Oil on Canvas) 2003, she employs organic elements that look like partially exposed fossils embedded in the surface, suggesting gestation.

In one of the most compelling works in the show, *Built On A Section* (Oil on Canvas) 2003, a band of yellow-green intersects a brown field in a visual equivalent of a dark blind opened to the greenish light of the tropics. Her signature stack of thin stripes makes a tower that echoes the blue form behind it. For this artist, the portrayal of the stack probably gives more information than she would have otherwise deemed necessary, but in this particular painting it provides an un-definable element that adds a playful touch of color.

Similarly, in *Pink Erosion* (Oil on Canvas) 2003, the artist employs a pink band over a brown-green ground. The relief evokes a

glowing fossil. The lower portion of the work is washed with thin paint that reveals indeterminate flotsam or algae in a dark pond. The piece exudes a feeling of calm, fullness, and completion. In *Blue Stack* (Oil on Canvas) 2003, stacked colored stripes overlap an active, bright, turquoise blue scraped surface. In this unassuming work, the elements are harmoniously balanced and appear deceptively simple.

In her recent paintings, Mackey carefully creates texture as she builds surfaces by overlapping constructed layers that mimic the process of growth and the passage of time. Her works impart a sense of ease; removed from strife or turmoil. Yet there is a level of complexity in the forms and hue relationships that feels personal, assured, and luminously attractive. 12/10 thru 1/4/04.

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