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NEW ART examiner



Martha Keller
Rosenberg + Kaufman Fine Art

If there are artists whose work we prize and those whose work we could live without, there are also artists we root for: gifted painters and sculptors, who, for whatever reason, don't quite achieve the magic we expect from art. This isn't to say that they have failed at their chosen profession--far from it. Their determination and intensity can be such that we search out their work in the hope they will, at last, hit the nail on the proverbial head.

For the past ten years or so, I have been rooting for Martha Keller. It should be reiterated that Keller, an ambitious abstract painter, has not been trucking in so-so art. Her work has evinced an intellect keen to the peculiarities of contemporary painting and a touch that is as appreciative of sensuality as it is classically detached. Still Keller's work has carried with it a self-consciousness that has prevented her from going all out. I am pleased to report that this is no longer the case. In her recent exhibition, Keller has given us a masterpiece.

Rudd Yellan Gruebleen Orangeman--the title, I am told, comes from *Finnegan's Wake*--is a squarish canvas inhabited by vertical stripes. These fluctuating blurs of color create a pulse similar to that of motion pictures or a panorama seen through the window of a moving train. Keller's striations suggest an environment in the process of evolution. A series of black stripes, placed just off center, arc dramatically into the viewer's space; offset by a heated expanse of red and yellow, they simultaneously anchor the work and set off its rhythms. Evocative and shimmering, *Rudd Yellan Gruebleen Orangeman* is a painting about the elusiveness of memory and of things just barely glimpsed. It is, in my estimation, one of the finest paintings by a living artist seen in New York this season.

I don't want to shortchange the rest of the work. The strange pinks and purples of *Slitting and Clicking* as well as a trio of smaller paintings showed Keller stretching as a colorist. Indeed, the exhibition as a whole evinced a painter who has, artistically speaking, arrived. From here on out, Keller is an artist we ignore at our own aesthetic risk.

Mario Naves