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ILLUSION AND ALLUSION

Los Angeles / Linda Sher Salzman

Don't think that the creative juices are not flowing in Los Angeles, they are. Just take yourself in and out of galleries and let your imagination float over the vast field laid before you. There is no paucity of innovative, newly birthed work – certainly au courant, certainly discussable. Yet a paucity exists, as it always must, of work that is rich and strong, that is timely and timeless, that is capable of proclaiming its own longevity.

What does it take to assess the measure of such work? Perhaps first and foremost is the need to determine that the work has a tight grasp on itself, that is to say, that there is a unification of the formal elements within and among themselves as well as a unification of ideational and/or emotional content and that these forces are inextricably bound together. It means ascertaining that the work contains within itself everything that is necessary to its vocabulary and nothing frivolous.

Ron Linden's new paintings at Ovsey Gallery are remarkable for this kind of singleminded spirit. In the best ones, nothing seems trivial, nothing out of control. Shapes are honed down to the barest simplicity and are adroitly placed in reference to each other and to the total piece. *La Terreur*, for example, is marked by tightly controlled color held in a range of earthy siennas and grayed beiges. The two major shapes are figurative and take the forms of a chair and chaise longue. Subtle in color and application, they function equally as compositional and ideational elements. New in Linden's work is his use of the frame as a compositional element. In some pieces the frames curve inward to squeeze and integrate with the elements within. For example, a black more or less rectangular frame whose top angle is not the usual ninety degrees and whose top border is wider at one side than the other is undeniably an integral part of the work. The color, shape and texture of the rough-hewn wooden frame integrate it with the other pictorial elements, leading the eye around and directing it to the right-hand corner. It makes the piece whole.

Light and shade play a role in this work as well. Shadows painted behind the chairs hint at light that reveals depth, but our eyes are kept forward by black starlike shapes that reinforce the two-dimensionality of the surface. The main thrust of *La Terreur* seems to be the juxtaposition of the two pieces of furniture and their fluctuation between an existence on the same plane or on separate planes. The quizzical attitude in which we find ourselves is produced equally by the play of spatial indicators and by the recognizable imagery that leaves us curious as to its significance.

There is a mystical quality of space united with mystical ideation in these paintings.

Linden's painting has been compared to that of Diebenkorn, and rightly so to the extent that the work of both artists is simultaneously intellectual and emotional. Linden's, however, is more somber. In his best pieces there is no easy reading, no ostentation or flattering of the eye. These are pictures that promote pondering and thought. They are, after all, about some kind of haunting nostalgia.