

"Up Now," by Lilly Wei

Longtime abstract painter Laurie Fendrich's current show in Chelsea, her first solo exhibition in New York in several years, brims with bold, clearly defined colors—a retro-rainbow of often unnatural hues inventively combined. Her lively, unusual combos, which can include chartreuse, teal, burgundy, puce, and warmed and cooled blacks and whites, are complex orchestrations of hues that are distinctively the artist's own.

Not an appropriationist, not ironic, Fendrich paints the old-fashioned way, working slowly, patiently, lovingly to create impeccably lush surfaces that are subtly luminous, with the colors' depth and richness brought out by a final glazing. Her easel-size fields are fully packed with carefully composed and tautly balanced shapes interlocked like puzzle pieces with negative and positive space equally weighted. Edges are softened so that a slight shimmer appears where one color meets the next.

Sometimes structured on a diagonal, sometimes rectilinear in orientation, their energy compressed, these oils are as carefully calibrated as a Mondrian, but made without preliminary drawings so as to keep them

spontaneous. Fendrich's shapes are playful, humorous—sometimes looking like details from a Léger—as they echo one another and switch between the abstract and the referential. Circles, ovals, and irregular serrated and cut-out geometric forms slip, for an instant, into stylized, silhouetted figures that look like little mannequins, hands, feet, birds, buildings.

The titles of Fendrich's paintings—words and phrases like *Cat's Pajamas*, *Tubs*, *Clinker*, *Noodlin*, and *A Single Man*, as well as *Five Sisters*, taken from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*—are part of the fun. Supremely intelligent, these engaging, well-made paintings (all 1999-2000) take us on an art-historical tour of the 20th-century from Constructivism to de Stijl to Synthetic Cubism to early American modernists such as George L. K. Morris, Stuart Davis, and Ilya Bolotowsky, to whom Fendrich's works are related. They deposit us in the present and the current revival of interest in painting. Stretching Austen's celebrated observation a bit, it is a truth universally acknowledged that straightforward, passionately sincere painting still matters to some, perhaps even to many.