

Neysa Grassi

Recent Paintings

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Locks Gallery

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Recent Paintings

Neysa Grassi's paintings are difficult.

Like Agnes Martin's or Brice Marden's works, they often contain colors that are not nameable, vibrant, or specifically identifiable. There are blacks that are not dominant, pale tallow yellows that hug nets like an aura of golden barnacles.

As for structure, there is no purity or essence. The paintings are the result of a layering process, chaotic patterning, portraying a meandering line that is sometimes blatant but most often veiled by her painting procedure: scraped down, scumbled over, misted with a fog of overpaint. This line, even under the surface, divides the canvas up into relatively uniform segments. An overall surface then, modulated by a lattice of fissures or ridges, of smokey color, a skin of paint on lines. And like skin, one sees into the surface, notes the veins, the broken vessels, the overall pallor of skin: now ashen, now bruised, now flushed, now blushing. Like skin, in that what at first seems a contiguous hide, a boundary between inside and out, now seems subtly articulated and translucent. One looks onto and into Grassi's paintings. The quiet radiance of flesh.

Her canvases are painterly and reveal her hand, removing them from the gridded reductivism of the 1960's. Grassi's lattices do not relate to the simple gestalts, slick fabricated surfaces, and immediate perceptions of Minimalism. Instead, they are more intricate; comprised of dense matrixes of brush strokes and palette-knifed passages in sophisticated stoic, earthy, or tarry hues. These linear strokes often twist around each other, literally weaving and knotting like wefts and warps; in effect, making them more organic and illusionistic. Or they stop, turn, and start in a new direction, like gnarly marks from a graining tool.

These networks initially resemble old tapestries and geologic formations. But on a more symbolic, metonymic level, they are like kinship bonds of filial relationships, stretching taut to the breaking point at times, separating or forcefully tied together at others. Strung out, unraveled, knotted, heated, blooded. At intervals, their objectivity heats up and Grassi's color takes on a seeming warmth.

Grassi's paintings are difficult. But they are worth the trouble.

Sid Sachs