

february 2009

# artcritical.com

***Joe Fyfe: Recent Work at James Graham & Sons***  
by Stephanie Buhmann

February 5 to March 7, 2009  
32 East 67th Street,  
New York City, 212 535 5767





Joe Fyfe *Square Curtain* 2007. Found cotton fabric, felt and cotton appliqué, 48 x 41 inches. Courtesy James Graham & Sons

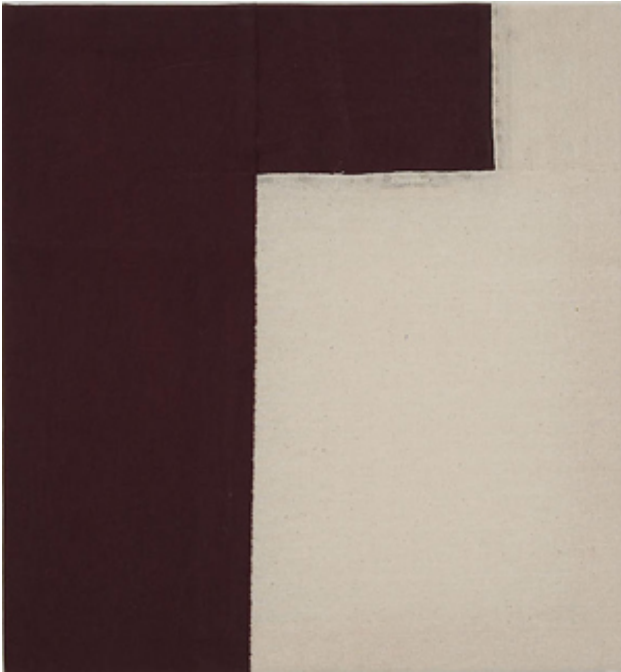
In his current exhibition of recent work, Joe Fyfe offers two distinct directions.

One room is solely dedicated to a series of rather restrained abstract canvases. Except for one painted piece, all of them are made of oxblood-colored cotton cut outs mounted on muslin. The overall sensibility is minimal, showcasing each distinct shape as sole gestural mark. They are elegant studies of the basic ingredients in art: light, positive and negative space, line and texture. Their impact is immediate and yet, upon further observation they turn into blank canvases for our imagination. As they leave us pondering what larger truths they might behold, Fyfe does not shy away from sharing his own associations by providing simple and interpretive titles, such as “Nun,” “Priest,” or “Door.”

The second room features a variety of paintings that are rich in color and ooze lightheartedness. Here, patterned textiles (a more recent development for Fyfe) are combined with pieces of felt, silk, painted or neutral jute or burlap. The inherent freedom of expression and joy in interrelating different materials bring the art of quilt making, as well as collage to mind. There is a striking looseness in these works that most clearly manifests in two works, *Long Curtain* and *Square Curtain* (both 2007). Hung from the wall, un-stretched, with seemingly countless holes, of which some have been filled out with saturated felt or fabric pieces, they contain the poetry of a starry sky and the luminosity of a stained-glass window in the afternoon sun.

While Fyfe has worked with combining more traditional methods of painting with textile collages for years, it is through the overt focus on counterparts in this exhibition, contrasting the more serious with the playful and the reserved with the whimsical, that Fyfe reveals both the diversity of his artistic interests and the extent of expressive versatility he has reached in his work. Much of this maturity can be credited to Fyfe’s extensive travels in recent years. After receiving a Fulbright Independent Research Fellowship in 2006, he spent six months in Vietnam and Cambodia and in 2007, and also participated in a residency program in Switzerland. Particularly in regards to his palette, Fyfe has noted that the exploration of different countries and cultures has expanded his color repertoire and that he accesses “that palette by shopping in a given country’s fabric markets and making my work with that colored

material.”



Joe Fyfe *Door* 2008. Muslin and Dyed cotton, 24-1/2 x 22-3/4 inches. Courtesy James Graham & Sons

But there also is an increasing sense of physicality in Fyfe’s work, which in the case of *Long Curtain* and *Square Curtain* can even lead to a true sculptural quality. This strong awareness of the body and its relationship to an object – and to Fyfe, a painting is indeed a physical object - also might have very well manifested in the very physical experiences a traveler collects. While passing through different time zones and climates, absorbing different voices, smells and tastes (not to speak of the visuals), we certainly test our bodies and senses in new unusual ways. Whatever Fyfe might have found or gathered abroad, he certainly has succeeded in developing a language free of geographical dependencies and without time constraints.

[Send comments for publication on this article to the editor](#)

