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Art in America

October 2005

Joe Fyfe at JG|Contemporary

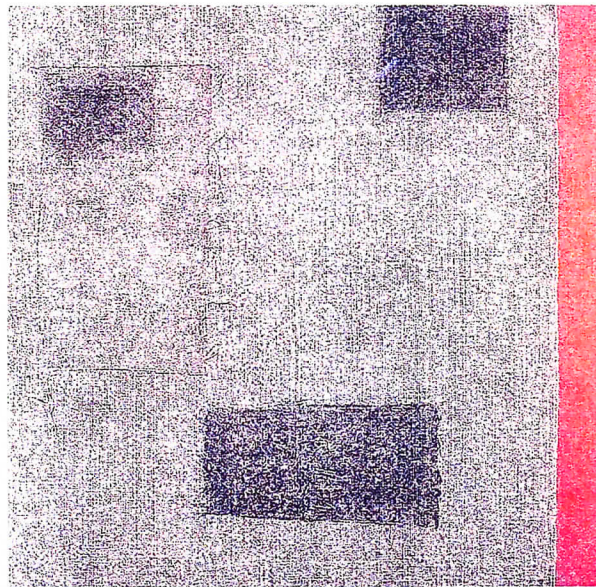
While officially this was a show of only five paintings, all in the front room and made last year while New York-based abstract painter Joe Fyfe was staying in Ho Chi Minh City, there were actually 11—four rather large and seven rather small—the remainder squeezed into the office of this boutique-size gallery. This is substantially up in number from the three that he showed in his first solo venture in the space in 2002 (then Jay Grimm Gallery).

Fyfe's brushwork and nonobjective images, though still restrained, also demonstrate a greater magnanim-

ity of gesture compared to the restricted, simpler markings in earlier paintings. Additionally, he has collaged a strip or swatch of brightly colored felt onto three of his newest works, *Portrait*, *Rivertown* and *Library*, which plays off the painted line, the painted area, the reticent palette. His support is still rough, loosely woven industrial burlap primed unevenly with white; to this, he adds touches of color—pale green, light blue and red against more neutral, elusive shades. These color shapes look washed out, soaked in or snagged on the surface, and paintings such as the ephemeral *A Whiff of the Klong* or *Red Balloons* with their pale red ovals recall the delicacy of watercolors.

These paintings are a far cry from the spangled crafting and technical tours de force that many young artists have hitched their stars to. Instead, they offer speculations, quieter pleasures, a glimpse, a tone, a transient light, a drizzle of paint, apparitions of a geometric shape, a certain awkwardness, with a take-it-or-leave-it kind of shrug that is disarming as well as persuasive. Fyfe, who has Buddhist as well as tough-guy leanings, is betting that these bits of materials, gathered together, will grow on you, will acquire something like beauty. His modesty is a feint, masking a great presumption. Fyfe is proposing that this is enough to make a painting, that this is enough to give you a world—with mindfulness, an intake of breath, an exhalation.

—Lilly Wei



Joe Fyfe: *Library*, 2004, acrylic, burlap and felt, 54½ inches square; at JG|Contemporary.

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