



**October 20, 2003** To view a film clip of the exhibition [click here.](#)

**Denise Gale and Geoffrey Dorfman at the Painting Center, 52 Greene Street to October 25th**

Denise Gale was the curator of the *Big Abstract Show* in this gallery back in June (which was subsequently reviewed here). Geoffrey Dorfman has recently had a book published, *"Milton Resnick Out of the Picture"* (to be reviewed soon; either here and/or elsewhere by Joe Valentini). His last show of monoprints in this gallery (March 2002) was reviewed on these pages.

This exhibition is most interesting for the juxtaposition of two very different styles of painting in a "this versus that" presentation. In this corner: Raw brutal gesture and intense color. In that corner: Gray, monochromatic, reductive gesture. Such differences are what smack you in the eyes as a first impression. And yet, similarities are found as well as logic in combining these two artists in one room.



Denise Gale, installation View



Geoffrey Dorfman, installation View

and then shove you back to catch your balance like some film-noir detective from a 40's movie. However, once you get past their heavily wrought emotionalism (and, figuratively, straighten your tie) you see how intelligently these paintings are put together.



Denise Gale, *In Memoriam for Paul Nisson*, 2002, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in



Start with Denise Gale - almost because you're



October 20, 2003 / page 2

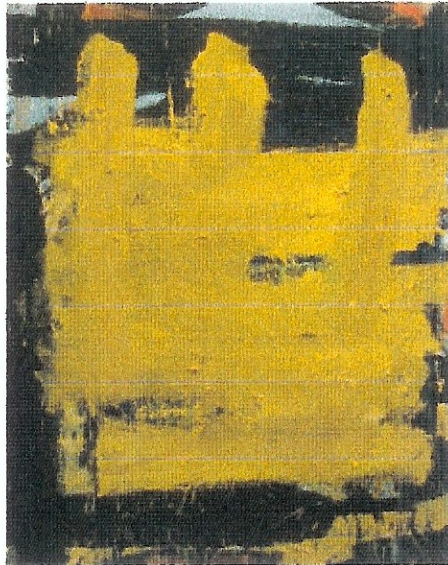
Gale uses large gesture and broad swaths of color to construct her forms and then, like a sculptor with a chain saw, carves out chunks of space. They look like they are just on the edge of becoming figurative but never quite cross the line due in large part to the deep sense of perspective implied. These paintings also look deceptively easy to make - just a matter of slapping some paint down. However, pulling off something as compelling, heroic and confidently intuitive as this takes years (and no small measure of talent) to develop. Look at *Yellow with Black Cross*, for example. Yes, you clearly read the yellow in the



Denise Gale, *Green Monster*, 2002, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in

foreground but notice how the color in that form shimmers from within by virtue of the various yellow, gold and subtle green hues that construct it. What is additionally marvelous is how quickly and confidently those strokes of paint were placed on top of everything else going in the painting. You do not achieve this by thinking about it too much or letting paint intimidate you. And such a thing can never be replicated exactly - even by the artist. Yet, it is just right, just uniquely perfect for this painting. Such an approach is consistently found throughout this work.

[Previous Page](#)



Denise Gale, *Yellow with Black Cross*, 2002, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in



Denise Gale, *Yellow with Black Cross*, (detail)

Now turn to the other side of the room (and spectrum) and consider the paintings of Geoffrey Dorfman. It is immediately clear that Milton Resnick has had no small amount of influence on Dorfman. Two key indicators are the even-handed painterly quality as well as the monochromatic color. This work may appear to be overwhelmed by the assertive imagery, color and paint handling found in Gale's paintings on the other side of the

[Next Page](#)

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October 20, 2003 / page 3

room. But don't underestimate the power of the color gray. Its strength is found in its ability to absorb and otherwise 'quiet' brighter hues.

Dorfman does vary color within his palette of grays, as well as contrast, but the differences are subtle. In *Widder's Dump* for example there is just a hint of violet plus an un-defined warmer tone woven into the surface handling. Compare this to *Ghost in the Machine* where the hues are cooler. In stark contrast to Gale, these paintings present a highly reductive esthetic. But in and of themselves they offer rich undulating surfaces in which bits and pieces of gesture are 'captured' in the paint. In this they possess an ancient quality akin to fossilized remains or pre-historic cave paintings. Yet at the same time they express a completely modern abstract sensibility.



Geoffrey Dorfman, *Widder's Dump*, oil on canvas, 40 x 42 in



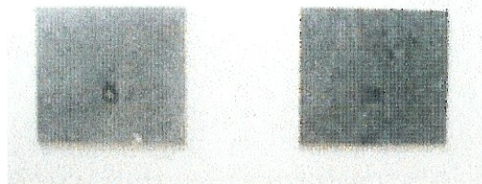
Geoffrey Dorfman, *Ghost in the Machine*, oil on canvas, 40 x 44 in



Geoffrey Dorfman, *Ghost in the Machine* (detail)

Now, what of the similarities between these two, otherwise, dissimilar artists? First, both find their imagery through the satisfactory method of simply applying paint to canvas. It is inconceivable that either of them would work from pre-conceived ideas or drawings. Second, both focus on gesture as their subject matter. In Gale's work this is aggressively applied where the imagery in some even hints at violence. With Dorfman gesture is more evenly spread across the picture plane to construct and 'find' form. Finally, both artists address spatial concerns through gesture. In Gale's paintings you seem to be able to look deep

foreground forms. In the backgrounds is hinted a suggestion of far off places glimpsed but nevertheless, inaccessible. In Dorfman's work the gesture constructs spatial depth that is shallower and uniformly more opaque. You get a sense of looking at these surfaces from a much greater distance (even as though miles away).



Geoffrey Dorfman, *installation View*

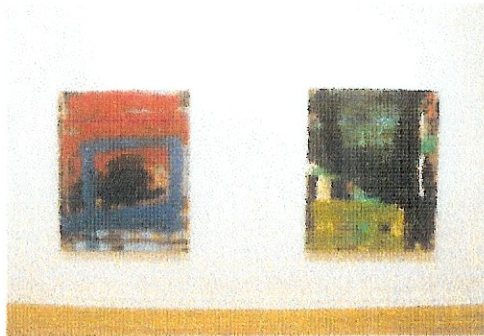




October 20, 2003 / page 4

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Last take: notions of gender painting are completely rendered false by this show. For example, suppose you saw each artist's work without knowing who created it and were asked to determine gender. The temptation would be to reverse the reality: A male made the brashly aggressive paintings, a female the gentler monochromatic work. This show throws all such notions and determinations away and leaves the viewer with just the paintings to speak for themselves.



Denise Gale, *installation View*

[Previous Page](#)

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