



Amy Sillman: *Big Girl*, 2006, oil on canvas, 80 by 72 inches; at Sikkema Jenkins.

Alert to her process, the artist arrested the development of three of these canvases at an early stage. *A Bird in the Hand* relies on the winning imagery described by its title, but, bereft of chromatic momentum, it looks merely unfinished. A smaller untitled work, 39 by 45 inches, hinging on steely gray, earth green, ocher and a shot of hot pink, implies the pictorial hubbub of the more elaborately articulated paintings with its complex encounter of a few elements (including that funny fist). A paradigm of the exhibition, the painting juggles two varieties of pictorial meaning: linear description and chromatic sensation.

Sillman acknowledges Philip Guston as a major influence, and this painting strongly recalls the humor and anxiety of his late work. Something of Wilfredo Lam lurks among the reedy thickets and creeping, startled creatures, as well as a vaguely retro mannerism that puts a slight curl on almost every edge and implies an ironic distance at odds with the guilelessness the artist seems to want to put across. It is hard to tell if this irresolution of sincerity and self-consciousness is a liability, or a source of much of this intriguing work's undeniable tug.

—Stephen Maine

Bernard Cohen at Flowers

Seven acrylic-on-linen paintings of recent vintage reintroduced Bernard Cohen to a New York audience. Though his only previous solo here was at Betty Par-

sons in 1967, Cohen has been a presence on the London art scene since the early 1960s, when his work was included in two of Lawrence Alloway's three "London now" exhibitions alongside such fellow abstractionists as Robyn Denny, Richard Smith and Harold Cohen, his brother. He showed in Documenta 3 (1964), and eight years later the Hayward Gallery mounted a retrospective exhibition. Cohen's mature work begins in 1963-64 with paintings in which a complex matrix of linear elements vies for

attention with the conspicuously measured process that begat it. His approach, in part a reaction to the then-influential Greenbergian model of the primacy of the artist's intention, was informed as well by a perhaps temperamental aversion to uncertainty about when the work is finished.

Cohen has put this strategy through its paces over the years, notably in large, intricate, graphically exuberant and spectacularly chromatic canvases of the early 1990s, and black and white paintings from later that decade that resemble diagrams or circuitry. Lately retired after a dozen years as director of the Slade School in London, the artist has regrouped, striking a coloristic balance between the extremes of the '90s work. In *Swarm* (2003, 6 by 8 feet; all paintings acrylic on linen), segments of concentric rings in black and white partially obscure fragments of a diamond-shaped mesh in cobalt blue with red and green infill. A white, vaguely Art Nouveau filigree is apparently the result of a meticulous stenciling technique. Fragments of a black-outlined yellow airplane tumble across the surface, and out of the brittle confetti emerges a glassy, boxlike structure. Cohen's crystal-clear mark-making is emotionally chilly, but the best paintings are so visually engaging that they convince through a sense of intellectual rigor. The paintings seem to be organized according to some recondite

system or protocol, though the viewer need not sort out the sequence of the procedures that result in the jittery, crackling field.

Four 24-inch-square paintings are expansive despite their compact size; in *One, Two, Three, Four—4* (2004), Cohen enlists a meandering band that wriggles across the surface, a feature common in his work of the '60s. In *Reflexus II* (2002, 40 by 50 inches) the artist's approach feels rote, and the painting is bogged down also by a copious, inert brown pigment. An untitled 6-foot-square painting of 2006 is focused on a point at right of center where five steely gray lines converge from the edges of the canvas. Between and behind them, like a transit map gone haywire, shards of a black-and-white pattern, shattered and overlaid, are invaded by areas of dotted grids, the proliferating airliner silhouette and more lacy filigree. Cohen's sturdy colors slide in and out, forming distinct regions and hinting at an aerial view even while imparting simultaneous, divergent sensations of scale, density and proximity. It is a marvelous painting; would that the artist's work were seen more frequently on these shores.

—Stephen Maine

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe at Gray Kapernekas

Comprising four paintings made between 2001 and 2005, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's first exhibition in New York since 1994 demonstrated that an analytic approach to abstract painting need not be reductive or didactic, but can be formally complex, sensuous and expressive. What makes Gilbert-Rolfe's self-referential work different from many other examples of this mode is that he does not reduce "painting" to a single event, to something that can be taken in all at once. For instance, in the center of *Step* (2004-05), a 70-inch-square canvas, he choreographs a complex structure of narrow vertical bars in varied tones of blues, yellows, reds and whites between a softly brushed, dusty rose-colored field and a broad, vertical lavender band. Starting at the bottom edge of the painting, the bars first follow the contour of a tan, skyscraper-like shape that cuts into the lower half of the lavender band. Moving beyond this form, these bars proceed to drift diagonally upward into the rose-colored field. Along the left edge of the canvas, Gilbert-Rolfe has added a thin

Bernard Cohen: *About Now*, 2005-06, acrylic on linen, 72 inches square; at Flowers.

