



on linen, 44 by 176 inches; at Max Protetch.

Five talky, diagrammatic drawings relating directly to the larger works accompanied the show; indicating “splatter coat” and “knife marks,” they confirmed that the paintings are essentially a series of surface treatments. Shaped by procedure, they resemble clinical studies, with hardly a milliliter of pigment out of place. Highly ritualized pictorial constructions, these elegant, stylish surfaces are to gut emotion as a boxing match is to a street fight. —Stephen Maine

### Judie Bamber at Gorney Bravin + Lee

How closely should we scrutinize for allegorical content a group of 11 views of an ever-changing, nearly featureless ocean vista, simplified to abstraction, by a loud-and-proud feminist heretofore known for her challenging, personal subject matter? The work in Los Angeles-based Judie Bamber’s seventh solo show may be sublimated emblems of unencumbered female sexuality or meditations on the universal mother or simply explorations of a rudimentary formal structure through which to display her hard-earned virtuosity.

The paintings themselves are beautiful, and a little hallucinatory. Simultaneously realistic and abstract, eight feature a more or less distinct horizon line, and the eye reads those canvasses up and down from that central, anchoring axis. *July 18, 2002 8:30 PM* (all paintings oil on canvas stretched over panel, 30 by 36 inches, 2004) is built around the meeting of a dense blue-green-gray, which lightens considerably as it shifts downward to the painting’s bottom edge, and a dusty pale lilac rising through bands of looming gray-pinks at the top. As if seen through a haze, the clammy gray at the midsection of *July 30, 2002 8:15 PM* settles into a warmer, less dense gray, while in the upper half, restrained violet gives way to a faint pink blush. Elsewhere, naturalistic detail is

summoned by the merest of means. Slight streaks describe swelling waves; a barely perceptible bunching of pigment indicates hazy clouds. Bamber often tweaks the color relationships at the horizon, as in *January 26, 2002 5:30 PM*, where inky blue ocean and radiant, dusty pink and greenish-yellow sky are cleft by a thin, hot glow.

In the three paintings where the horizon is obscured, we scan for it anyway. Its absence emphasizes surface, the creamy, glossy skin of paint brushed wet-into-wet, with repetitive horizontal strokes that are nevertheless sensual, not mechanical or rote. The upper section of *April 1, 2002 2:30 PM*, a gauzy blue-white, darkens through a ghostly transitional area before sinking into a chalky, slightly denser blue-gray with a suggestion of green along the bottom. It is a membrane of light, a faithful rendering of enveloping fog, both the most abstract and the most realistic painting in the show.

In their extreme reductionism and startling clarity, the paintings might be the flipside of photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto’s atmospheric, minimalist views of sea

and sky; the single-mindedness of the pursuit recalls Thierry De Cordier’s obsessive focus on the same motif. And there is no avoiding thoughts of Rothko, whose late paintings, especially, with a shift in chromatic heft near the horizontal axis, can be read as an elemental rupture of earthbound form and atmospheric void. Bamber’s remarkable paintings do not suffer in the comparison. —Stephen Maine

### John Greer at George Billis

This show featured 15 recent abstract works by New York painter John Greer. These meticulous, hard-edge, acrylic-on-wood or -canvas compositions, all untitled, are made of interweaving lines and interlocking geometric shapes, thickly painted in primary colors. Using reductive forms and a limited palette, Greer manages to convey in each piece a sense of flickering light and frenetic movement. The late work of Mondrian is a key inspiration here, but Greer employs more varied shapes and favors a deep ultramarine blue, a muted, almost golden yellow and a saturated orange-red.

In the entrance hall, the artist showed several small and medium-sized rectangular canvases in which thick, unbroken lines of red, yellow and blue stretch horizontally across the surfaces in repeated bands. The evenly spaced and densely packed rows bend slightly at the center in a gentle curve. The colorful bands in two smaller works form more

Judie Bamber: *July 18, 2002 8:30 PM, 2004*, oil on canvas, 30 by 36 inches; at Gorney Bravin + Lee.

