

## Joe Fyfe at JG Contemporary

Eschewing "easel painting decisions" for a collagelike process that allows for great procedural flexibility, Joe Fyfe elicits emotional fine points from deceptively broad gestures. Generally, his paintings fall into two size ranges. They are either a few inches to a foot or two on a side, or 5 to 7 feet high or wide. He works in acrylic on burlap, with a lot of muslin, felt and terry cloth, and even a little linen here and there. In the small works, like *Aram* (2006)—orange felt drizzled with dark green paint and adorned, along its top edge, with a red-and-white-striped dishtowel—material physicality obviates illusionistic space and the paintings begin, therefore, to resemble sculpture. Fyfe tacitly acknowledges this *Informel* effect in *Merkin* (2006), affixing to its burlap surface a tattered band of orange-yellow felt and a fuzzy, bright red hank of the same.

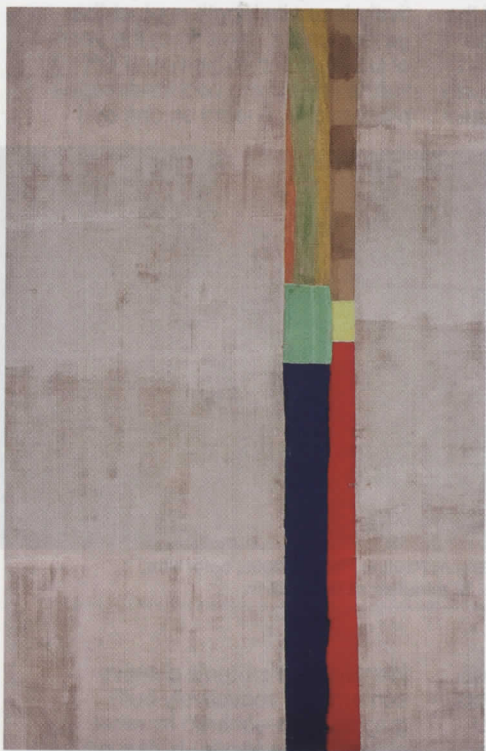
If the small works walk the line between rugged and ragged, the larger pieces are more obviously, conventionally elegant; the scale of the materials' weave makes other demands. Washes of white acrylic accentuate the texture of the burlap and yield a modulated, pale tan to warm gray that the artist often uses as an open field, a foil for smaller patches of strong color. It is a conservative strategy, which Fyfe follows as successfully as anyone. The multiply subdivided vertical band of vivid chroma that rises, off-center, through the 9-foot-tall *La Gloire* (2006) looks compressed, as if the burlap walls were closing in. *For Steve* (2004) is even more austere, and typical of the work Fyfe showed two years ago at the gallery's erstwhile Chelsea space. A hot, yellow-green band of felt occupies the horizontal gap between two lengths of whitewashed burlap, answered by a sagging diagonal in faded red-orange acrylic across the upper left. The artist remains conspicuously indifferent to the

niceties of craft: the pieces are held together with glue, but the imprints of the staples used to clamp the glued sections misleadingly resemble stitches.

*Jatetok* (2006) was the showstopper. A commanding if atypically comical central shape, a Matissean cutout in yellow felt, resembles a cartoony, prone

andlestick or maybe a woodwind instrument out of Dr. Seuss. With flanking bits of gray, it constitutes a middle zone between the crimson-smeard burlap above it and the blue-mottled expanse of deliciously crinkled muslin below. The piece would read as a landscape, except that the upper edge of the yellow is formed by the overlapping "sky," which further complicates the figure/ground relationship and prompts the viewer to wonder what the piece looks like from the back. In fact, Fyfe states that often it is not clear to him which side is the front side until late in a work's creation. It would be satisfying to see the artist bring to this larger format some of the gnarliness he has mastered on a small scale, and preserve the attendant sense of risk-taking. This accomplished painter may

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Joe Fyfe: *La Gloire*, 2006, acrylic on terry cloth, felt, linen and burlap, 108 by 70¼ inches; at JG Contemporary.

become a distinguished one when he stops pulling his punches.

—Stephen Maine

## Wolf Kahn at Ameringer & Yohe

"Wolf Kahn: Sizing Up," a two-part exhibition of the artist's recent work (accompanied by a two-volume publication with an essay by critic Karen Wilkin), featured 15 large-scale oil paintings followed

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