



Albert Oehlen: *Brandloch (Burn Hole)*, 2003, oil on canvas, 110 by 134 inches; at Luhring Augustine.

of runny blue-black and purple-black glazes that form the lumbering, shadowy dominant shape go soft around the edges where they meet with a flurrying yellowish ground.

The dry, scraped shards of warm black suspended in a pale field in *World of Good* (44 by 72 inches, 2003) evoke the action of waves. This is the one painting in the show featuring a distinctly matte surface. More often, surfaces are glossy, or even sticky-looking, and unafraid of seeming unpretty. The radical wiping-out of *Let Up* (42 by 36 inches, 2003) is reminiscent of Bill Jensen's use of the same technique: the painting has not been abandoned so much as left the hell alone.

As a photographer, Seidl channels Albert Pinkham Ryder. What might be called an apparitional quality in her paintings was even stronger in the nine black-and-white photographs on view, as in the filigree of tree branches against silvery moonlit water in *Stairway* (2002). There's plenty of recognizable imagery to do with a wooded lakeside property and the people who gather there, but the massing of ghostly pale forms and streaking linear elements on dusky or velvety black grounds makes the effect nocturnal, while the atmosphere in her paintings might be characterized as afternoon haze. The photographs are nearly uniform in size, around 15 inches square. Of them, *Studio* (2003) is the standout. A pair of vertical rectangles is almost lost among the shadow and glare of

tree limbs and nightlights. They are windows, glowing white in the dark. —Stephen Maine

### Robert Yasuda at Elizabeth Harris

Robert Yasuda's most recent paintings belong to the genus of things illuminated from within. Studiedly eccentric and also gracious in their shaping, each is made up of a finely crafted wood support, variously bowed, curved and rounded at some edges, feathered, grooved and extended elsewhere, and then painted. Each is covered with a veil of scrim, painted again and then sanded, so that the surface appears to shimmer from light trapped within. The paintings are installed in ways that respond to the architecture of a room and to the viewer. In this exhibition, Yasuda's translucent palette runs from lavender to pale, electric green in fields of color that recall the blossoms of the jacaranda, a tropical tree whose intense blue flowering precedes its soft green leafing.

Each section of the roughly 7-by-8-foot triptych *Signal* (2003) is a shaped, continuous modulation of pale rose, intense aqua blue and blue green. The upper, outer corner of the panel to the right juts outward almost sharply, and the diagonally opposed corner on the same panel is softly rounded. The lower left corner of the central, largest section is similarly rounded, while the upper edge of the one to the left is carved away at an angle of perhaps 10 degrees

along part of its length. The lower, outer corner of the left-hand panel is scooped away by a carpenter's gouge in a way that only seems to mirror the sharp extension of the triptych's upper right. This process of shaping suggests the appearance of motion. Here and elsewhere, Yasuda extends this sense of play to the articulation of light, shadow and color along the painting's left and right edges, where a darker hue of purple is reflected against the wall from the unseen, painted back of the wood support.

The 42-by-24-inch *Elevation* (2002-03) exemplifies the engaging, atmospheric physicality of Yasuda's carefully conceived works as it protrudes at the upper and lower right and rounds off at the upper left. Given over entirely to a celebration of painting, it is more or less bisected at a diagonal of golden russet dappling on a field of hyacinth blue, and suffused with ambient light. The subtly shaped corners and painterly 6-by-3-foot field of *Breath* (2003) admit broad zephyrs of cool green across a sunny surface, casting reflections of luminous pink like shadows on the wall. In such meditative ways, Yasuda conveys his enjoyment of the integration of painting and the shaped support.

—Edward Leffingwell

### Albert Oehlen at Luhring Augustine and Nolan/Eckman

These two exhibitions of recent work by the German painter Albert Oehlen arrived attended by the machinery of myth-making; the artist's back story is even bigger than his paintings. Kingpin of the punk-era Hamburg School and leading proponent of Bad Painting in its European incarnation, Oehlen has for some years been turning out the most visually brash painting imaginable. It is almost surprising that his new work holds up under the weight of expectation.

Oehlen explores the valence of struc-

ture versus chaos by appearing to eschew traditional compositional resolution. Keenly interested in the shapes of things, he taunts the viewer's impulse to identify subject matter. Among eight large paintings from 2003 at Luhring Augustine, antic hybrids of the appropriated and the invented, we are barraged with glimpses: kneecaps, a coffee-maker, a scrotum, a sewing machine. The recondit imagery is further obscured behind a shifting scrim of rigorously casual glazes and painting-out. These works are train wrecks of visual incident, spectacular bouquets of disorder; they are operatic in scale and ambition but look like they were painted as the artist was falling down a flight of stairs. Yet Oehlen executes his high jinks with such undeniable flair that the viewer can only conclude that practice makes imperfect. The paintings may be "bad," but they're also quite polished.

Surfaces are extraordinarily varied, sporting areas of high-gloss varnish disembodied from any pigmentation and offering an alternate, tactile set of pictorial facts. Each painting has one or two dominant features in the inchoate swirl around which the composition revolves. In *Stueck (Piece)*, 110 by 134 inches, a brushy rectangle of pink and pale orange is loosely framed against a dark-green coil: hose, serpent or tentacle.

Many works rely on the leav-

Amy Pleasant: *In the Back of a Car*, 2003, oil on canvas, 72 by 60 inches; at Jeff Bailey.



ening effect of areas of white or near-white. In the absence of that device, *Brandloch* (Burn Hole), 110 by 134 inches, most daringly flirts with failure. A fragment of a console television in the lower left establishes a rectangle motif that recurs throughout. Blurry fields of murky browns and grimy grays almost overwhelm the odd streaks and smears of hot lavender and violet, and splashes of blue and green. It is the most spatially clogged of the paintings in the show; even the open area at the center bottom of the canvas has an unclean look and provides no relief. As if in a jokey attempt to “unify” the composition, an intense blue glowing rectangle is installed dead center.

The quotidian gray of newsprint photographs dominated a show of 28 small collages (and one painting) concurrently on view at Nolan/Eckman. The collages provide a nice antidote to the bombast of the canvases. In each, a few images are artlessly patched together, their Dada spirit in keeping with their facile, throwaway humor. The relation between images is left ambiguous: in one untitled collage from 2004, a big-bottomed showgirl in a sparkly wig, red gloves and little else frolics alongside an uninhabited, limply hanging tunic and cap, and a line drawing of a wire armature for a clay sculpture. The feel is that of a warm-up exercise. The artist’s desire to demystify and democratize the artistic process is well known. Even so, compared to the paintings, these are more about style than substance, and it’s unclear whether they aspire to anything beyond demonstrating that a memorably disjunctive image is within the reach of anyone who possesses a stack of news-magazines, a pair of scissors and a tube of glue. —*Stephen Maine*