

**Julie Joyce**  
**Garnet Press**

Toronto  
May 3 to May 25

*Abstracts for the Home* is a deceptively simple name — for a show of smart art characterized by post-modern wittiness, academic but not didactic. Joyce's paintings are indeed abstract, but "for the Home"? Joyce has snuck in a quick reference to the *Abstracts at Home* show held by seven of the Painters Eleven in 1953 in the furniture display of Simpson's, hence the Simpson-Sears catalogue French Provincial living room suite collage of Joyce's announcement card. It's also a pun on the medium, latex house paint on paper, not to mention an ironic reference to the undeniably attractive and accessible decorative quality of the work ("I throw out anything I suspect of looking like office painting"). Pretty loaded for something so unassuming, and typical of the artist's *modus operandi*.

Good house paint is unobtrusive stuff. It totally lacks depth; otherwise, our walls might drive us batty. House paint furthermore doesn't streak, and brushstrokes carefully applied or overlaid to be readable as brushstrokes appear to parody themselves. Subsequently, most artists limit their use of house paint to walls, but Joyce — who first experimented with latex house paint on paper because it was cheap — was attracted to its intrinsic anti-painterly qualities. In works such as *Dragon* we witness the artist's futile attempt to overcome the inherent flatness of the medium. The picture plane triumphantly declares itself; where the artist "fails" the painting succeeds both as painting and an allegory of painting.

Joyce's concern for the intuitive and expressive balance of form and colour evokes Malevich's Suprematist canvases c. 1915. For example, some of the colours in *Snowflake #69* — a bathroom fixture pink, memopad gold, and two particularly murky blue-greens — verge on the genuinely ugly, and yet have been manipulated with a highly sophisticated colour sensitivity to collectively appear... pretty. The shapes in paintings such as *White Underside* and *Bad Suffocation* — circles, ovals, modified stars, triangles, spikey arabesques — and their placement on the paper, unequivocally recall Jack Bush. Joyce's artistic preoccupations echo those of Matisse; colour, the picture plane, and the potential "restfulness" of painting, Matisse's



Julie Joyce, *Dragon* (1984), latex on paper, 31 x 25 cm., courtesy: the artist

celebrated "good armchair". Here we have the unabashedly decorative arabesques of *Fancy Egg* and, recalling *papier colle*, the bold, playful organic forms of *Tomato at Midnight*.

The paintings are, nevertheless, highly innovative. Joyce has rejected the current predilection for difficult figurative painting, opting instead for the unfashionably abstract and accessible, but not the unintelligent. Joyce is developing a contemporary abstract idiom, one perhaps reliant upon a certain amount of semiotic hindsight. The abstract forms operate not only as Jungian symbols (they evoke eighteenth century Tantric diagrammatics) but also interact on a formal level within the hermetic confines of the composition. In the two figure *Inverse Wave*, for example, an enormous, limp sine wave echoes in its uncoiled state a taut figure eight. A more complex series of relationships is established in *Chess*, in which each circle, arabesque and line refers back to the half-circle of what might be a blinking eye. "Significant Form" takes on a new meaning.

The frames, which were specially constructed for this exhibition, transform the paintings into low relief white latex (frame) on white wall (latex). White mats have been hacked to echo the uneven stippled and torn edges of the paper. Some of the smaller frames are recycled, in one case recarved, Sally-Ann; the larger frames are parodies of frames, held together by an improbable system of brackets and bolts that resemble Frankenstein's head-gear. The largest paintings are not so much framed as riveted between imperfect sheets of white-painted plywood and plexiglas. They are antiframes for painting in antipaint.

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