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Around The Galleries

Small works with an intense focus

by Leah Ollman

Sandra Mendelsohn Rubin has described herself as, in some ways, “a creature from the past.” She paints with uncommon deliberation and sustained attention to the shifting tones and textures of the landscape — in the ‘80s, the urban sprawl of her native L.A., and more recently, the expansive vistas of Northern California, where she has lived since 1990. However quietly traditional her approach, it serves an acute awareness of the present, the ever-changing now. Her new paintings at L.A. Louver are fresh, vivid and beautiful.

Rubin has typically worked small, and the more diminutive canvases here are gems of concentration and close observation. In one, afternoon light settles on the slope of a hillside with gentle grace as well as a stirring sensuality. In another, Rubin frames a tight view into dense winter woods, the foliage all grizzled and frothy. These images are intensely intimate, measuring just 6 by 5 and 9 by 7 inches each.

Some of that intimacy is lost in her move toward a larger scale, but the bigger paintings have their own power. In “The Bungalow” (45 by 95 inches), an isolated structure lighted from within perches on the edge of a canyon drop, gleaming in the thickening dusk like a beacon, a safe haven. In “Winter Fog on Peachland Road,” a vast panorama at 21 by 152 inches, Rubin captures the way milky moisture generalizes the landscape, turning complex forms into simple silhouettes. She knows how to steer our eyes across a flat surface as though through a broad expanse, offering lines of passage — roads, power lines — and details, such as



Hillside in Spring, 2009, oil on polyester
6 x 5 in. (15.2 x 12.7 cm), frame: 9 3/8 x 8 3/8 in. (23.8 x 21.3 cm)

the textural shift where pavement meets grass, that provide a resting point, a stillness to savor. That kind of rich, visual experience never loses its currency.



The Bungalow, 2009-2010, oil on polyester
45 x 95 in. (114.3 x 241.3 cm), framed: 46 1/4 x 96 1/2 in. (117.5 x 245.1 cm)

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through Saturday.
<http://www.lalouver.com/>