

Art in America

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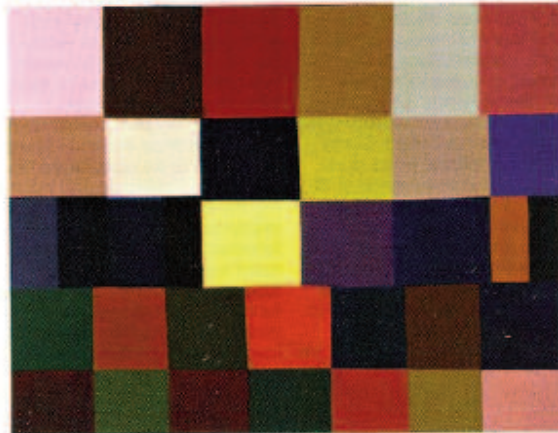
Helen Miranda Wilson at DC Moore

Helen Miranda Wilson is well known for exactly detailed and slightly surreal landscape, sky and still-life paintings. In her recent show at DC Moore, she cashiered that naturalistic style in favor of small abstract panel paintings (the largest are 16 by 20 inches) composed of loose grids of variously colored and sized rectangles.

While these paintings (which reprise a similar series of works on paper from the 1970s) betray no representational content, they assiduously deploy the formalist resources that may be left over when pictorial content is eschewed. With the deliberate and meticulous hand of a miniaturist, Wilson gauges the level of hardness of the edge between patches of color; adjusts the grid in some places to be uniform and rigid, in others to be more humanly flexible and imperfect; gently drags wet paint from one square into the confines of another; and varies the dimensions of the individual blocks of color to be sharp and sprightly in some paintings, and plodding and dull in others.

Photographic reproductions tend to impose a false evenness and unity on Wilson's paintings; in fact, she creates discombobulating shifts in the color and scale of their elements, with a visual power not usually associated with such (only apparently) modest exercises in form. Indeed, in the intensity of focus on the expressive contiguity of different rectangles, Wilson's paintings share a natural affinity with the large, muscular abstractions of Sean Scully. At least two of her works, *Tom's Salad* (2004)

Helen Miranda Wilson: *February 19th, 2004, 2004*, oil on panel, 16 by 20 inches; at DC Moore.



and *Rembrandt*, for *Pat Lipsky* (2005) even seem to incorporate some of his hues and paving-stone configurations.

While other works in the show also have titles that may refer to their ostensible content—such as *Baby's Smile* (2005), a panel painted in small units with a limpid, bright and weightless effect overall—most were named after days or times of the year. Yet, although the format of the paintings recalls a calendar page, and the references to particular dates suggest some association between the events of those dates and the mood conveyed, these paintings never devolve into an arid intellectual or conceptualist program. Nor is there a minimalist submission to an independent grid. Indeed, one sees a craftlike dimension in these works, suggesting patchwork quilts, flags, shields, rib-

bons and honeycombs (Wilson is a beekeeper). In some cases this folksy element indicates a tentativeness about how tightly to constrain the color and form of the composition in the service of an effect, in most it results in a wonderfully pied beauty typically foreign to the styles of geometrical abstraction.

—Jonathan Gilmore