

Art in America

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Katherine Bowling at Greenberg Van Doren

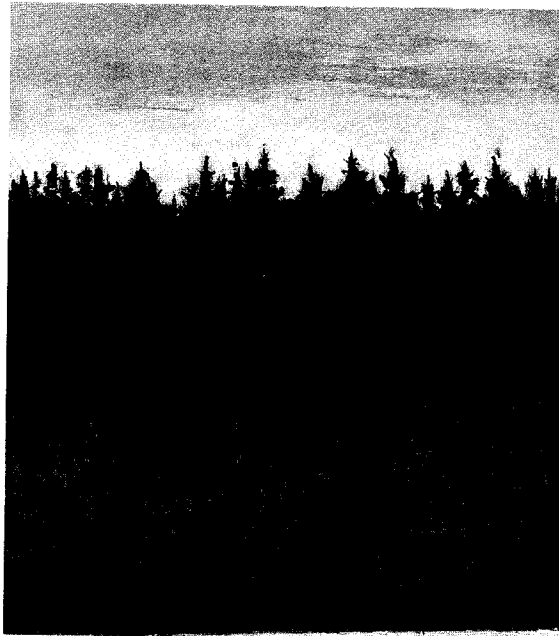
Emergence, dislocation and reconnection were the prevailing themes in Katherine Bowling's recent exhibition "Divide," her first New York gallery show in five years. Over a dozen luminous oil-on-spackle-on-wood paintings produced between 2001 and 2004, all views of the countryside near her home in

upstate New York, depicted unpopulated views of nature, segmented or bordered by rural highways and paths. The road, both a participant in and a generator of vistas, becomes a surrogate for the human presence.

Unflamboyant in their paint handling, generally modest in scale and interiorized with a mood of self-sufficiency, Bowling's compositions confidently make the point of painting's viability as an art form born of tradition but not hampered by it. The artist insists, for example, on reiterating the seemingly mundane motif of lines converging in the distances in works such as *Divide*, *Sunday*, *Curve*, *Shade*, *Tangle* and *Vacation*. The very repetition brings out a meaningful point, namely that traveling along familiar roads that lead to familial places can invite introspection about where one is and where one might otherwise be. To this observer, Bowling suggests that even comfortable solitude can lead to disquieting states of mind.

In *Plain*, *Lines*, *Petal*, *Roadside Weeds* and *Leaf*, nature is segmented less abruptly. Roads don't suddenly emerge in the foreground, only to dissipate in the distance. Instead, they linger in the field of vision on a more or less equal footing with the verdure they border. *Roadside Weeds* is Bowling's startling, off-the-road showstopper, where the familiar has never seemed so defamiliarized. Dramatically divided into thirds (sky, tree line and grass), the organization of *Roadside Weeds*

Katherine Bowling: *Roadside Weeds*, 2002, oil on spackle on wood, 48 by 42 inches; at Greenberg Van Doren.



is countered by a slivered view of the highway's edge at the bottom of the work. Here, a contemporary language of displacement speaks about the claustrophobic conflation of near and far, here and there, nowhere and everywhere. —Dominique Nahas

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