

Isabel Bigelow: *falling (grey)*, 2008, oil on panel, 40 by 72 inches; at Sears Peyton.



ISABEL BIGELOW SEARS PEYTON

For the eight new oils on panel in this exhibition, Isabel Bigelow reduced natural forms to iconic silhouetted shapes in compositions strongly influenced by Japanese prints. Minimalist and decorative, her work makes landscape the occasion for an extremely refined treatment of materials and painting surfaces.

Each work assumes a distinctive size and format—panoramic horizontal, small square or large diptych—in which she investigates relations of dimension, proportion and shape. The group (all 2008) included allover paintings, near-monochrome paintings, and paintings that emphasize both asymmetry and strong contrasts between dark and light.

In the nearly monochrome, 22-inch-square *untitled (space between yellow)* forms are barely differentiated from yellow ground. In a reverse configuration, the spectral image in *red tree* is centered. Both paintings rely on a relative evenness of tonality and invisibility of facture, as compared to other works on view in which the surface treatment assumes prominence.

In three allover paintings, *snow*, *falling (grey)* and *falling (blue)*, Bigelow manipulated the surface through an extended process of painting and sanding, transforming individual snowflakes (in the first painting) and crescent-shaped leaves (in the other two) into marks of varied densities and transparencies. This is especially effective in *snow* and *falling (grey)*, where the layering of shapes on burnished surfaces and the streaking of color residue through the pale grounds introduce a sense of time and motion. In *untitled (grass)*, the individual arching, linear blades laid down in two different greens and their overall configuration in the field strike a balance between the deliberately clustered and the randomly dispersed.

Asymmetry serves to slacken the tension between image and abstraction in Bigelow's paintings of willow trees. In *blue willow*, her use of a high-gloss varnish, as well as her meticulously geometric stylization of individual leaves, signal her prioritizing the painting's decorative details over its character as object. Such an emphasis was easily encompassed in the show's broad premise of formal variation, linking Bigelow's project with both 19th-century symbolist landscape painting and 20th-century seriality.

—Susan Rosenberg