



Los Angeles artist Yvette Gellis' newest body of work, on view this summer at the Garboushian Gallery in Beverly Hills, is at once monumental and intimate, majestic and quietly alluring, muscular yet derived from empty space. These new oil paintings are sprung from Gellis' imagination, yet it is the vague and sometimes elusive hint of narrative that gives them their subtle power.

Originally from the Midwest, Gellis grew up in an idyllic community just outside Chicago. She describes the experience of childhood days spent in "a magical old English Tudor house," that was torn down and replaced by a tacky housing project. This sense of having borne witness to a kind of homogenization, a sterilizing of that which all children deem sacred—i.e. mystery and the power of secrecy—has found its way into her work on many levels. These paintings derive from an essentially authentic gesture, an unrelenting investigation into the history of painting as an undeniable medium to express perception and loss, and finally to celebrate beauty. As Gellis herself remarks, "Life is a duality coming at us all the time as the darkness tries to penetrate, yet everything around us is fleeting, disappearing, blown apart even as it is built up. I suppose one could call this the sublime." The sublime is keenly felt in these recent works, as in the painting *Entropy* (2011) where a confluence of jagged vertical lines that might reference a cityscape transforms into a wild visual fandango where more open-ended, less linear gestures explode out from the center.

Articulate and passionate about her practice, Gellis received her MFA from Claremont in 2008 and went on to exhibit with the Kim Light Gallery where she had her first solo exhibition in Los Angeles. Gellis' new work nearly anticipates its own formation as buildings spring up, in much the same way that a dream might or might not become a nightmare. Structures appear to explode out from themselves, only to float in a strangely streamlined utopia that is at once flawed, immeasurable and painstakingly alive. "If I'm too controlled, I'm in trouble," Gellis explains sheepishly. "There are so

many different components of thinking that must be considered when making a painting, but the trick is to forget them completely. In the less and less is more and more."

This is an apt description of Gellis' working methodology, in which images are melded and extracted from a lengthy investigative process wherein the artist uses photographs, which she then translates into thumbnail sketches and then further translates to the larger canvas. Fragments of recognizable shapes break out from sprawling fields of color with startling and inexhaustible energy as Gellis attempts a harbor between the known world and the less predictable and sometimes fractious terrain of light and shadow.

Influenced by a variety of artists including painters James Turrell, Robert Irwin, Tomory Dodge, Ingrid Calame and Charlene von Heyl, Gellis' ultimate goal is to conjoin human experience such that both the artist and the viewer undergo a translation, a shifting of the atmosphere outside the living body toward a deeper, more concentrated interior space. Indeed the idea of interiority is keenly felt in these paintings even as shapes shift and careen through open space. In the powerful piece *Pipe In Yellow* (2011), for example, the literal and familiar shape of a metal pipe grounds the surrounding space including an oddly disjunctive gesture at the right end of the canvas where a surge of black paint spills forward with tremendous force. The pipe serves as a ballast for the energy in this work, and Gellis returns to this central motif over and over. "The idea of being provocative is important to me," she says, brushing the hair from her eyes. "I am fascinated with what paint can do, literally, as an elastic medium, and working directly onto the canvas is always a tremendous risk, but one that must be taken."

—EVE WOOD

The solo exhibition "Yvette Gellis," was on view at Garboushian Gallery in Beverly Hills, CA, from July 23 – August 27, 2011
www.garboushian.com



"PIPE IN YELLOW"
 2011

OIL, ACRYLIC AND PENCIL
 ON CANVAS
 66" x 102"

PHOTO: COURTESY
 GARBOSHIAN GALLERY