

Acrylic on canvas, 5 x 6'  
Courtesy  
Foster  
Goldstrom  
Gallery



## SHARON CAROL

One of the most challenging issues painting has accepted is the creation and depiction of pictorial space. The range of solutions to this singular problem spans the entire history of art, and is as diverse as the individuals who produced them. Within the context of 20th-century painting, two distinctly unique methods have evolved.

Obviously, one must accept the expanded use of photographic processes as a recent development. These mechanical means of translating three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional format defy the classical approach of painting based on the graphic arts, by replacing the eye-hand interaction with a precise system of representation. Although this reduces the individuality of spatial expression, it does provide a tool capable of handling the infinite variety of real images. The other approach accepts the premise that a pictorial space is a natural consequence of the interaction of color and form. This idea is best illustrated by the large abstracts of Rothko or Pollock.

Because of the inherent differences in these two concepts, it is difficult to imagine a type of realism or real space developing out of an essentially abstract system of color and form; but this is exactly the basis for the recent Photo-Realist work. This abstraction of real space is precisely what

interested these painters; but quite often their efforts failed because they chose images which could not be abstracted without destroying the pictorial integrity. Thus, much of the work has been classified alongside abstract pursuits such as grid painting, which defeats its purpose.

Sharon Carol's recent work develops from a similar synthesis of elements, but succeeds by depicting images which can be abstracted yet retain their cohesiveness. For this reason it is possible to speak of a richness of surface in Carol's work which is lacking in much Photo-Realist painting. This is even more impressive in light of Carol's use of the airbrush in creating her surfaces.

Rather than evolving from a strict formalist background, Carol's soft images of fabric grew out of a genuine concern for the material. For nearly ten years she pursued tapestry as an art form. These early works established her interest in real images as well as defining a process for building these images from distinct forms and colors. This procedure of segmenting an image into a group of abstract shapes is similar to the Photo-Realist approach, but became less im-

portant as Carol began to concentrate on the possibilities of using fabric as an image in itself.

Thus, Carol's paintings attempt to create the illusion of real objects, not their mere representation. Her work gives the impression of large pieces of silk and satin draped over the surface of the canvas. These works, structured from folds and layers of different fabrics, do not elicit the same reaction as much contemporary realism; instead, they aim at revealing the incredible depth and richness of their beautiful imagery. Several of her earlier pieces actually incorporate cloth in the final paintings, enhancing the trompe-l'oeil effect and testing the viewer's power of perception. Due to the type of surface generated by the airbrush, it is indeed difficult to distinguish the real from its representation.

What makes these pieces so unique is their ability to retain this illusionistic quality even on the surface of the canvas. One is tempted to touch them in order to confirm their visual illusion, displaying the depth and luster of real cloth even at close range. This warmth seems hard to imagine from an acrylic airbrush

these qualities possible. The soft lines of draped silk become a natural result of the gentle sweep of colored spray; unlike painting with a brush, the airbrush does not leave a texture of its own which might detract from the strength of the image. This elicits a smoothness and surface quality that heightens the effect of Carol's balanced compositions. The ability to mix color on the surface of the painting is also a trait of airbrush work. Through overspray and the meticulous layering of pigment, Carol is able to capture the subtle interaction of light on cloth.

In her most recent work, she has begun to illustrate other materials besides silk and satin. By juxtaposing fabric and Mylar, Carol achieves an incredible range of color and texture. First she constructs a small composition using the chosen materials and strives for a balanced interaction of form, light, and color. This still life is then photographed, providing a static image to paint from, but Carol continues to refer to the actual set-up for more precise visual information. By a combination of painting from life and working from photographs she captures the genuine illusion of real objects.

Sharon Carol's "photo illusionism" is an interesting concept in terms of both contemporary realism and current illusionism. It serves to unify the lack of consistency which continues to plague modern painting, by defining a real pictorial space in abstract terms. While this is consistent with the recent Photo-Realist doctrine, Carol's success is its failure. She has established a type of imagery which continues to function in abstract terms even at the surface of the canvas. This synthesis of diverse elements has been a recurring theme in much 20th-century painting, but Carol unites many of its best qualities into a single approach. These paintings succeed in view of recent formal issues; however, their true strength lies in her devotion to painting as a visual tool capable of expressing extremely subtle qualities about the process of perception. (Foster Goldstrom, San Francisco, November 21-December 24)

Michael Blaine