

Art in America

EAST HAMPTON, NY

Sally Egbert at Fotouhi Cramer

Sally Egbert's oil paintings are as hypnotic as aquariums. They engage the viewer in two ways. First is a keenly sympathetic use of color. In *Honey* (72 by 46 inches), one of the two largest paintings in the show, the phrasing is fanciful and light—her color is dreaming, bordering on the iridescent. Heaving leaves of marigold/mustard, bright black and a yellowed mint work with a couple of darker enclaves—big, purple-gray vertical sections which ground the piece like castles in the tank.

A second element that makes these abstractions go is a quality of watery jostling. The painter teases us with a deftness that fleetingly dangles variegated funnel shapes of color, twisting before our eyes. A few scrawls of crayon beef up her painted marks, accenting the top and lower end of the funnel forms. Big tornadoes, here they come. The feeling is of reaching. *Crow*, the other big canvas, is made up of darker hues—blues and purples, blue-black and a watery gray drip, nicked with a long black wiggling cross of paint on the right third. It suggests an awkward intimacy. The despondency of *Crow's* color seems to flatten out the surface.

There were seven paintings in the show. In *Sea Breeze*, one of the small ones (34 by 28 inches), color floods in from the top in discrete stalactites of hot orange and green. Egbert articulates a different fantasy space in each of her paintings, as if each canvas has chosen to explore a feeling, a chemical, at its own special

speed, its own way of introducing itself. Using color, she abstracts motion. Egbert's chief concern seems to be pinpointing distinctions—to name the moment in color and space.

—Eileen Myles

Sally Egbert: *Honey*, 1996, oil on canvas, 72 by 46 inches; at Fotouhi Cramer.

