

Public Projects / Private Works

San Francisco / **Andrea Liss**

Jack Greene's open studio exhibition offers an interesting opportunity to see how a painter approaches the two extremes of individual, private work and collaborative, public art. Recent painting and paper pieces are exhibited with proposals and models for murals and environmental spaces. The show demonstrates that the subtle power and intimacy of good painting can be translated to the realm of public art.

Because of the diverse philosophical reasons for and varying styles in mural

art, predominate approaches are figurative, hyperrealist and decorative. Greene is not exactly a muralist but, more precisely, a conceptual designer of environmental murals. His sensitivity to the architectural space of a given site is clearly expressed in the mural panels he designed and executed for the Oakland Fence Project. His panels are columns of subtle, sophisticated color that act as passages between the other murals, giving an overall unity to the site. His mural paintings are conceived to function in harmony with the specific architecture, best demonstrated in his model for the Oakland Youth Center building.

When Greene is working on his own paintings, he is guided by an integrated approach similar to that displayed in his mural work. Greene is very much a traditionalist, essentially concerned with exploring the inherent contradiction of depicting three-dimensional space on a flat surface. He is equally interested in the quality of the paint. Working within the confines of those specific problems, Greene reaffirms the possibilities of the painting medium.

In *Presence* (1980), a projected shadow of a chair recedes into space while a warm-hued shell and a metal grid — one of the recurrent props upon the stage of Greene's paintings — float close to the surface. A mysterious, almost ominous, quality emanates from the blurred edges of the chair's shadow from the strange, hovering objects. Juxtaposing

images of real objects and geometric designs is in part similar to the surrealists' manner of seeking unexpected meaning from new fusion, but Greene's merging of objects also allows an exploration of the inner quality of each object. Although united in one work, the objects seem, paradoxically, isolated from each other.

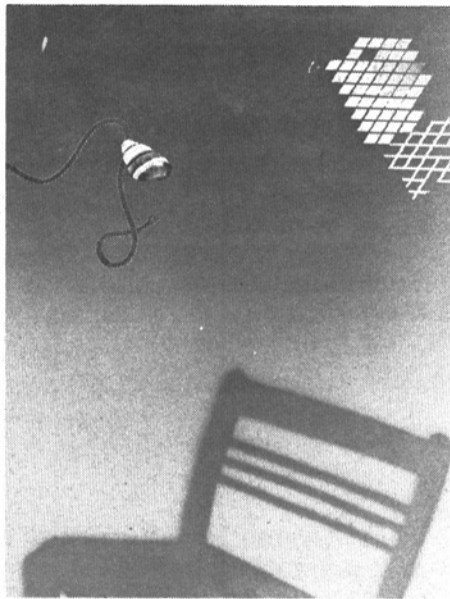
This duality recurs in a work on paper, *Persia* (1982), where paint handling expresses both calm and movement. Well-defined geometric areas contrast with expressionistic brushwork, yet the two distinct styles do not cancel each other out. Greene manipulates illusionistic space on the paper's flat surface, again reminding us of the contradictory nature of rendering three-dimensional space. The misty, expressionistic areas of paint draw us deep into the painting at the same time that a gridlike object moves our focus back to the flat surface. Color in Greene's works on paper is usually brighter than in his paintings, but *Persia* has a delicateness with its soft purples, grays and muted oranges.

The successful results in *Persia* are achieved by a careful balance between and division of illusionistic and flat space. *Ghost Ship in Chinese Waters* (1982), a work on paper, loses a sense of singularity precisely because this isolation of elements does not occur. Although title and image function together cleverly, a visual focal point is missing in this piece.

In *Untitled* (1982), an overall sense of unity becomes more important than creating a sharp contrast between deep and flat space or between active brushmarks and smooth paint handling. Yet, a subtle juxtaposition of elements is present in this work. Forms are precise without being hard edged, and geometric and organic shapes are kept in quiet play by the balance of muted, fleshy pinks and grays. *Untitled* expresses harmony, as in music, that color can attain. □

Jack Greene's studio exhibit will be open 1-6pm on October 30, 31 and November 6, 7.

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Jack Greene, "Presence," 1980, acrylic, oil and linen, 65" x 50", at 514 Frederick, San Francisco.