

## ART

# A 'Painterly' Show in Jersey City

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

**T**HE term "painterly" is one of the most enigmatic in the art lexicon. It should be straightforward, meaning involving primarily the manipulation of paint. But such a focus on the movement of the artist's hand does not necessarily yield information critical to an understanding of a body of work or a philosophy. In other words, painterly is often too easy a term, used when the critic or curator is groping for something to say.

But where it does have meaning and resonance is in the area of relativity or comparison: This painter's work is more painterly, showing more of the personality via movement of the hand, than that one. A show, that makes its points by comparison, is what Gary Reynolds, curator of painting and sculpture at the Newark Museum, has put together for the Jersey City Museum.

The show, "New Painterly Abstraction," features four artists with whom Mr. Reynolds said he became acquainted with through studio visits. On a wall placard he writes: "They accept the historical idea that profound emotions can be called forth from the artist's manipulation of paint. Yet each seeks new ways of conveying their ideas to the viewer." Such an elemental concept of painterly yields an exhibition in which one constantly turns or changes locations in the gallery to compare the emotional force of works that are without

narrative or anecdotal content. This exhibition is nothing less than an enlightening workout.

The most enticing paintings are those of William T. Williams. His concept of painterly is to juxtapose in the same frame different rhythms of the hand. He also uses a stencil to include apriori images. He achieves statements that, to this viewer, have the improvisational quality of jazz, where one set of rhythms bursts into another. The major motif in "Swan Station" resembles a brick wall and the painterly element is the laying down of the individual brick. One questions whether such a systematic arrangement as this fits the definition of painterly. But it does if a component of regularity is what is to be revealed about the artists' personality. Mr. Williams ups the ante by including a large area of patterning thought of beforehand. The pattern, certainly a stencil, has great flair. The pattern though about spontaneity is not spontaneous.

Another painting "Jake's Advice" is striking because in it the control pattern is jettisoned. It is a canvas divided vertically with the top half, primarily in camouflage green, smaller in area than the bottom half, which is a rather luxurious mix of pink and blues. The radical shift in color scheme is as important or more important than the movement of Mr. Williams's hand, which tends here to trace more or less floral patterns like those found on Victorian wallpaper. Controlled spontaneity is his strong suit.

On the other hand Alison Weld

seems to be dictated to from above. The hard-worked vertical strokes that dominate her paintings occasionally give way to horizontal bars, which can act as distance markers in a rough perspectival space. But the main focus is on the labor that is evident in laying down those strokes of scumbled paint. Ms. Weld's titles include "Structured Weight" and "Inward Weight," betraying the labor intensiveness here.

If this labor might be thought of as analogous to earth moving, Ms. Weld's colors are appropriate. Earth-brown tones are what stay in the mind with her work although she uses oranges or dull blues, too. The slowness comes from a period in her work when she was inspired by the slowness of fossilization. Several of Ms. Weld's paintings here seem preparatory to "Inward Weight," which involves a more equal number of vertical and horizontal elements. The result is patterning resembling a rudimentary quilt and more felicitous colors. The colors of spring flowers peek through the crisscrossing. It is as if all the previous slowness — painterliness for Alison Weld is equal to speed — is the plowing and the last painting is the blossoming.

Linda Swanson doesn't look at all painterly from afar. What is seen is the architecture of her work, panels mounted on a section of curved molding. Thus the panel stands out from the wall several inches, but this bold independence is the structural equivalent of painterliness.

As for the paint on the panels, it appears at first to be monochrome

and then the eye sees at least two colors, two layers of paint competing. But the low level of the shift in color tells us how close Ms. Swanson comes to painting in a monochromatic way. Because her device with the molding has such an imperial stance, the presence of the hand working in an almost back-and-forth manner is the humanizing component. In profile, the molding resembles the falcon in Egyptian hieroglyphics and abets the hieratic grandeur that Ms. Swanson aims to achieve in her works.

Architecture also echoes painterliness in the work of Lorenzo Clayton, an Indian painter. The weaving of laths of wood in his work seems to relate to Indian crafts. All of Mr. Clayton's paintings are versions of "Richard's Third Hand," a mysterious title, and part of the painterliness here is the inclusion of mysterious imagery. All of the paintings contain a drawing of what looks like a plump turkey thigh and slender leg, some scribbling, and other incidental drawing. Each is capped by a singular wood pediment. In short, Mr. Clayton's paintings are stewpots of imagery, gerrybuilt to boots. But one gets the sensation that he is extending the concept of painterliness; the wooden stripes work like painted bars. The repeated imagery seems to be reaching for a symbolic, arcane but potent truth. If one is impatient with the pure abstraction that dominates this exhibition, Mr. Clayton's contribution might provide a needed kick.

The exhibition continues through Nov. 30.



"Richard's Third Hand," mixed media by Lorenzo Clayton