

Art in America

MAY 1998

HOUSTON

Jackie Tileston at Lawing

Jackie Tileston's exhibition included six large new paintings and five charcoal drawings. In the paintings, the floating elliptical spots of paint or pigment that once danced across her richly colored atmospheric fields have given way to comic creeping tendrils and undulating disks inspired by fractals and chaos theory. Tileston's forms tend to erupt from the edges of the canvas and spin endlessly into the depths of optical space. It is

this space that is her work's most intriguing feature—wholly believable, even traditional, in its behind-the-picture-plane illusionism. She returns to the watery depths of Monet's lily pond paintings or the cloudy vistas of Turner's seascapes as if Cubism and Greenbergian flatness, much less the screenlike space of post-modern painting, had never happened. When combined with the psychedelic forms and colors of the fractal shapes, the result is a cacophonous clash of temporal references.

Bambi's Dilemma evokes a mood of Dr. Seuss in outer space. From the edges of this 6-by-7-foot canvas, purple and orange striped tornado-shaped fractals curl toward the painting's center as if to infinity. Through a light blue-green atmospheric ground float pale yellow puffs of dry pigment that have been applied with the artist's hand rather than a brush. Small rainbow-ringed amoebic

shapes peek in and out of the cloudy space along with a single flat-black clover-like shape. Against the lyrical passages of aqua and yellow oil paint and pigment—here watery, there airy—the thick, visibly brushed enamel paint defining the fractals has a more physical presence. A smear of bright red intrudes from the left edge

of the painting, which also sports a few rainbow-ringed disks. The intensity of color and light, due especially to the use of unadulterated pigment, in Tileston's work is astounding, as is the joy she so obviously takes in the act of painting.

Where Tileston's paint-handling can be vitally awkward in places and contribute to the works' exuberance, her drawings exhibit an almost classical restraint. Burbling from the edges of vertical sheets of paper, her densely black bulbous forms recall nothing so much as the silhouette, endlessly replicated, of the head and nose of the cartoon character Egghead. Although the shapes are flat and their edges finely defined, the charcoal has been blown on or slightly smeared to activate the paper's white space. In the drawings, however, Tileston stops short of the illusionistic effects that characterize her optically seductive paintings. —Frances Colpitt



Jackie Tileston: *Fink*, 1996, oil, enamel and pigment on canvas, 66 by 60 inches; at Lawing.