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## Art in Review

By ROBERTA SMITH

Frances Barth E. M. Donahue Gallery 560 Broadway (at Prince Street) SoHo Through July 1

Frances Barth's new paintings put the techniques of Color Field abstraction to the service of landscape. It is not the coherent, semi-abstracted landscape of Milton Avery, who influenced the movement and whose soft shapes and colors are sometimes visible here, nor the gestural extravagances of Helen Frankenthaler. It is, rather, a more fractured, multi-layered terrain similar to that in the work of 80's artists like David Salle and Julian Schnabel. It combines suggestive abstract motifs with a relatively precise landscape vocabulary derived from maps, charts and topographical diagrams, and flavors it all with intimations of Japanese art.

These new paintings are quiet, often poetic compendiums of the ways in which earth, water and atmosphere can be evoked and signaled. In "L. Rides West," for example, a spare topographical cross section shares the space with a series of whirlpool spirals, a dark curving wavelike pull of pure paint and a linear rendering of a mesa that is echoed, in the negative, by a dark irregular border. Another dark shape snakes through the painting's cream-colored center like a murky river through a desert.

Transparency is crucial to Ms. Barth's layering, and to achieve it, she has diversified her technique almost as much as her imagery; paint is loosely brushed, pressed on in patterns, dripped, rubbed and liberally interspersed with delicate line drawing.

The results, while not highly original, are among the best paintings Ms. Barth has made during her 20-year career. They show her working successfully to expand both the craft and meaning of her work, with an assurance and ease that had previously eluded her.

ROBERTA SMITH

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B01EFD8133AF933A25755C0A962958260>