



MARIO NAVES

A Quiet Facility Thrills: Still Lives With a Deft Touch

Boy, does Sydney Licht have the touch. Ms. Licht, whose still-life paintings are the subject of an exhibition at Lyonswiergalerie, works predominantly and adroitly with a palette knife. Spreading oils with a crisp concision, she brings a sense of give to the surfaces, a flexibility and airiness. She brings to them a density, too, though it may take a moment to recognize just how in-

tensely physical the pictures are. Ms. Licht revels, though with judicious restraint, in the malleability of her medium. She loves the way a buttery smear of pigment sits upon the canvas; and she loves it just as much for its ability to refer to tangible stuff. The assurance of Ms. Licht's approach is appealing, though it can make you a little suspicious: Is she coasting?

What you notice right away about her paintings of oranges, eggplants, gift boxes and paper bags is an unwa-

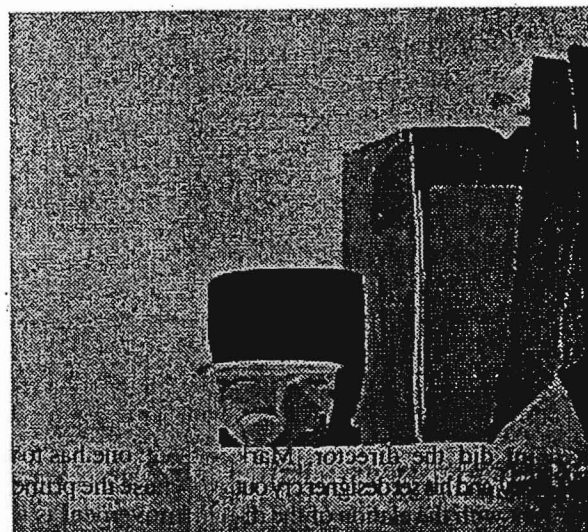
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vering facility. It's not an ostentatious facility—and yet, what a thrill it is to watch this painter quietly go to town!

Should Ms. Licht be making more of her gift? True, her habit of placing objects on a tabletop aligned with the bottom of the canvas, then playing the flat patterning of the tablecloth against volumetric forms, generates pictorial tension. This may be the artist's idea of a challenge, but the game is rigged. The metic-

ulousness with which she composes her pictures (she takes great care with the edges of forms that touch or fail to touch; she sneaks them into the viewer's line of sight)—that game offers more artistic promise. Relationships between objects, rather than collisions of genre, are more suited to Ms. Licht's astringent realism.

Sydney Licht is at Lyonswiergalerie, 511 West 25th Street, until Sept. 30.



Astringent realism: Sydney Licht's *Still Life with Yellow Bow #2*, 2003.