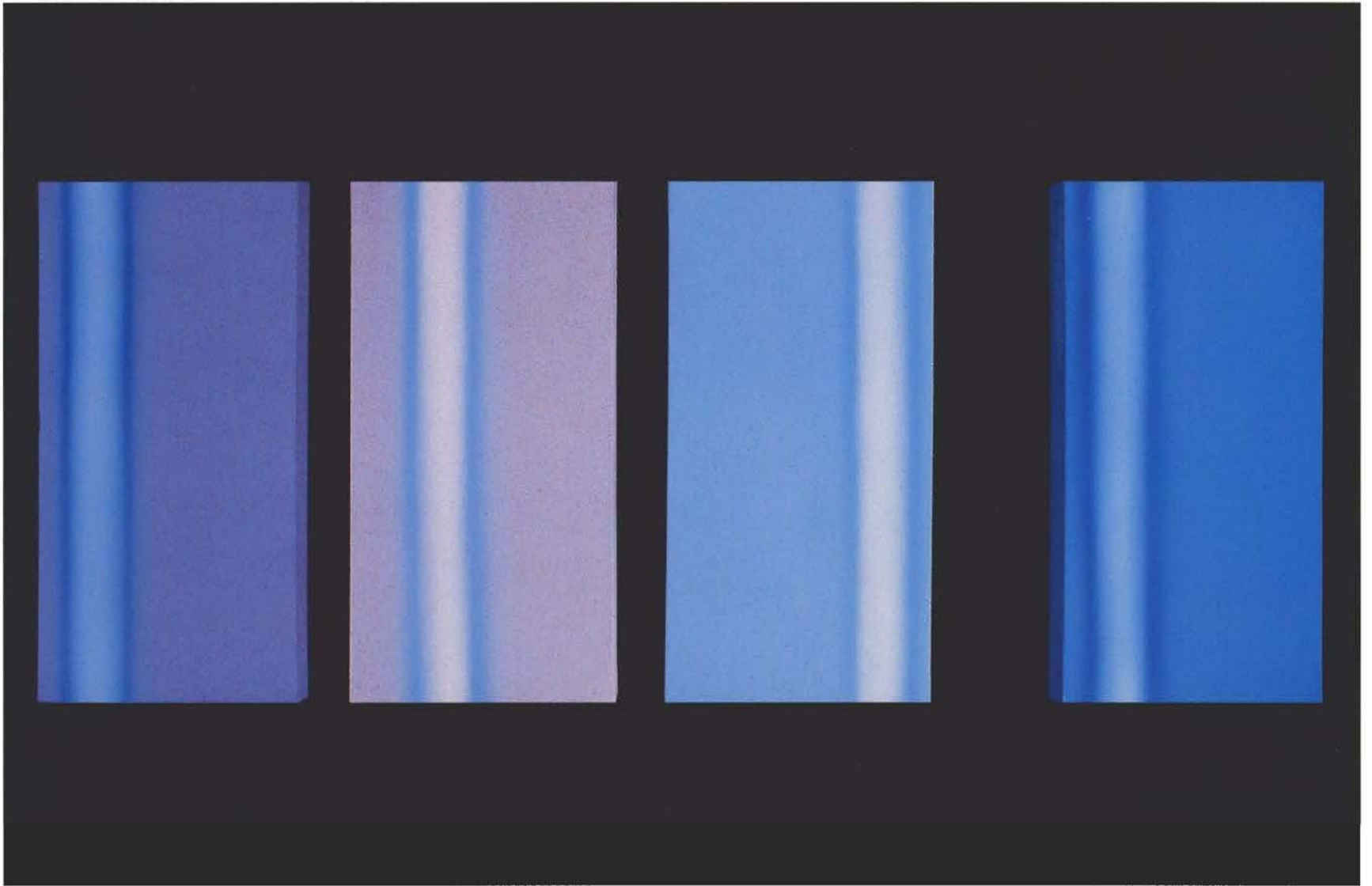


DENISE RAMOS & TRICIA MOREAU SWEENEY

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ARTIFICIAL LIGHT

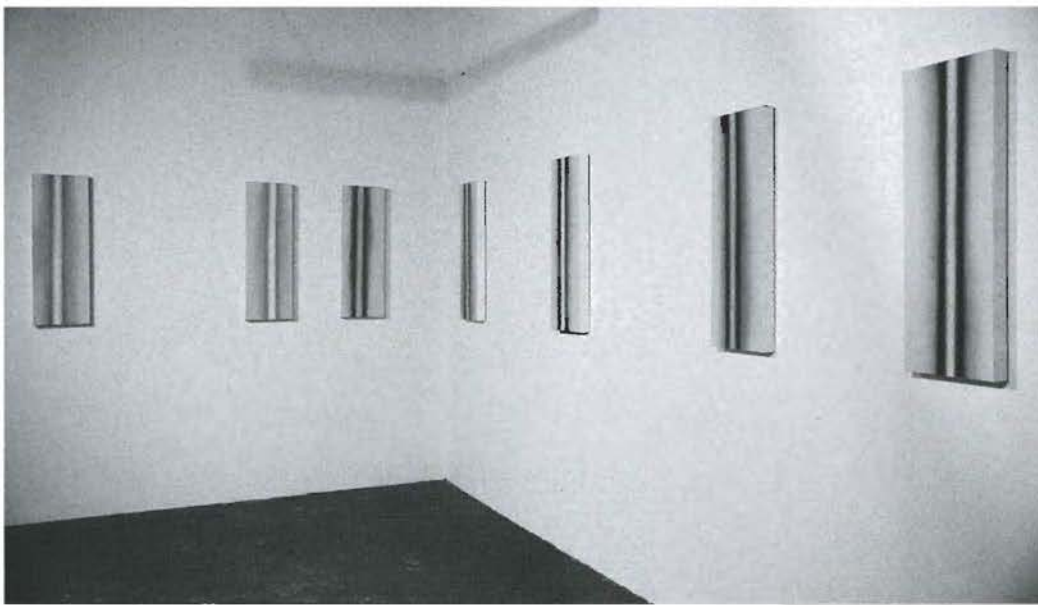


WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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JUNE 27 - AUGUST 3, 2002

AUSTIN, TEXAS



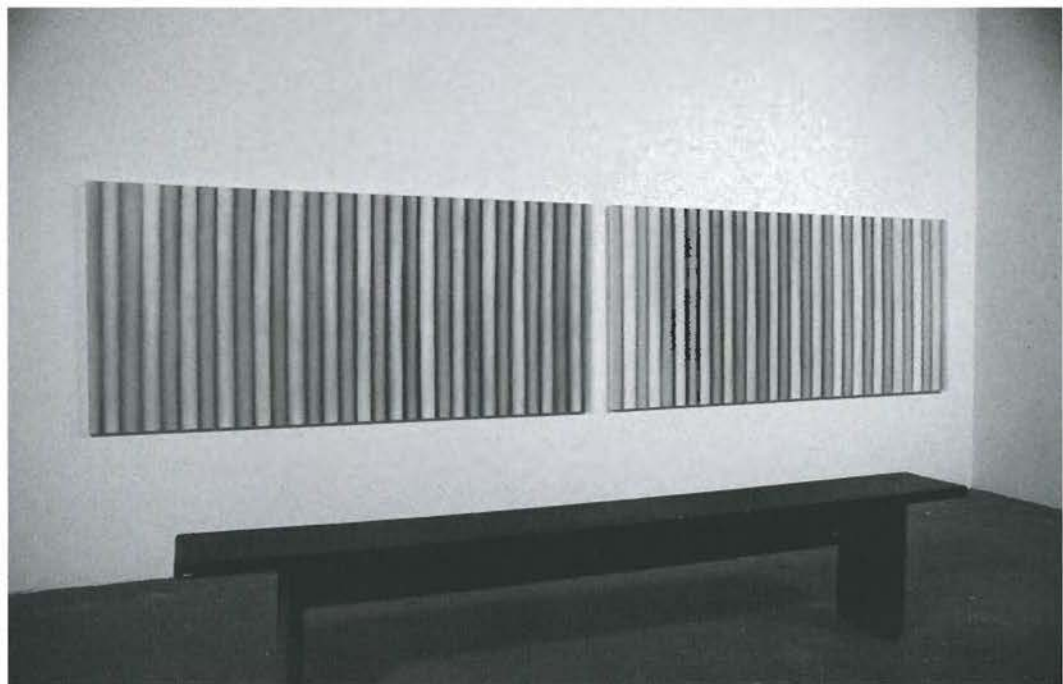
Denise Ramos, *Installation, Untitled Series*, 2001-2002. Alkyd and oil on canvas.

## DENISE RAMOS

Painting has a lot to compete with in the contemporary world of art, and with installation, video, digital media, and cable TV, it's often easy to forget just how stimulating a work on canvas can be. Denise Ramos has not forgotten, however, and her paintings, deceptively simple and minimally composed, remind us that paintings on canvas are not only relevant in a historical context, but still pack a transcendent visual punch.

Ramos, a self-taught painter, initially began painting as a means to illustrate another love: sound and music. Her paintings, carefully glazed and always arranged in a linear series, were the translation of what she saw in her mind's eye: colorful sonic vibrations. A musician in her own right, Ramos painted what she felt when playing her electric guitar. These works, in eye-popping and vibrant monochromes, filled the studio space where she worked,

listened, and performed, like sound waves which had somehow taken form and lined themselves onto the walls.



Denise Ramos, *Installation, Untitled Series*, 2002. Alkyd and oil on canvas.

Denise Ramos' most recent works, though similar in many ways to her first endeavors, have taken a subtle and interesting new direction. Though more muted in palette, many of these works convey as much, if not more, of the same radiance and luminosity. In many ways, Ramos has slightly shifted her focus to accommodate the increased mastery of her medium. Her drive to capture what appealed to her aurally has become something in and of itself: an attestation of beauty in color, modeling of form, and the transcendence of paint.

These surfaces, whether in cool grays or electric hues, are luscious and seductive. The vertical, modeled stripes at one moment seem like velvety draperies, while at others seem like bars of glowing fluorescent light. Ramos, ever aware of her work's visual potential to hypnotize and lull, often juxtaposes

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DENISE RAMOS, resides in Houston, TX. She attended The Glassell School of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX. from 1982-1985 and received an Associate of Applied Science in Culinary Arts, from the Art Institute of Houston, TX. in 1994. Denise Ramos has been in group exhibitions since 1998 in Texas and New York.

buttery colored pigments with a deep, shocking purple or red. Sometimes she does this within the same painting, or interrupts a series with a typically exclamatory interjection. In this sense, she has created a perfect marriage between her two passions: a slow, dreamy sequence, musical in nature, acquires a fast tempo.

Denise Ramos relishes this control over her viewers, and like any good performer putting on a show, wants the audience to get the biggest visual bang that they can before walking away. This is why she hangs one of her works at a peculiar and effective level. Ramos, incapacitated from an automobile accident since high school, paints from her wheelchair. It is at her eye-level while seated, then, that she has chosen to arrange this recent work. While this may seem unorthodox compared to most gallery installations, it really makes the painting more accessible, and the difference between the hanging of this work and the others makes a significant statement. Ramos has thought to install benches before the work, thus enabling the viewer to sit, contemplate, and enjoy the work as she has done in her own studio. Ramos knows that looking at a painting can be a moving and thought-provoking experience, and shouldn't necessarily be an uncomfortable one. It seems unfortunate that more museums and galleries can't or don't take her cue.

Denise Ramos is a painter who, aware of the digital and technological wonders around her, wants to dazzle her viewers with light and color and beauty. Perhaps teaching herself how to create these wonders was a wise choice; in lieu of trying to make works that would try to compete with more up-to-the-minute media, she makes glowing reference to these media without taking away from her own.

## TRICIA MOREAU SWEENEY

Tricia Moreau Sweeney's photographs are disturbing and paradoxical. Generally set in what appears to be a typical back yard or household interior, often depicting the actions of a young housewife and her small child, these pictures are layered with complicated meaning. In one *Self-Portrait* (1999), Sweeney stands amidst the hanging clothes on a line with only her legs differentiating her from the drying shirts. At first glance this struck me as comical, something a little girl might think of to amuse a friend while playing in the yard; however, there is something about the juxtaposition of colors, the nighttime setting, and the way the edge of a plastic pup tent intrudes into the right side of the frame that darkens the humor. What seemed goofy and prankish settled into something closer to loneliness and isolation.

The clump of dry, dead brush in the corner lends a menacing element. Even if she's on a camping trip and not in her own back yard, she seems to have only the other shirts for company.

In another *Self-Portrait*, Sweeney captures herself, mid-leap, as she hops upon a stove that has been abandoned outside. Here, too, there is an air of playfulness at the surface, a casualness. Yet Sweeney's red house dress, battered heels, and gartered stockings are more the attire of the temptress, of someone having been ravished, in a *The Postman Always Rings Twice* manner.

That Sweeney arranges these semi-domestic scenarios outdoors adds an element of magical realism. Her character could be living outdoors, the exterior of her home having mysteriously blown away. Perhaps she's homeless, an out-of-touch



Tricia Moreau Sweeney, *Recession*, 1998. Type C Color Photograph. 16" x 20"

woman practicing the memory of a previous domestic life amidst a rural junk pile. Or maybe she's just having a backyard adventure. With their rich colors, idiosyncratic juxtaposition of objects and subject, and dynamic composition, these photographs bristle with a number of enticing narratives.

Certain elements of Tricia Moreau Sweeney's photographs are cinematic and narrative in the way that many of Cindy Sherman's best *Untitled Film Stills* are. Both artists capture the flavor of the female psyche of their generation. Sweeney's film stills seem lifted from a beautiful, funny and cynical indie movie, a female-narrated Hal Hartley film, complete with odd gestures and gorgeous, painterly colors. Her self-portraits depict despair, self-awareness, loneliness, dysfunctionality and neglect: the depression and frustration that might drive a woman to languish upon her kitchen counter. In a world where so many women consider themselves to be third generation feminists, it is noteworthy that the sad and possibly mistreated homemaker is still a figure that can generate angst.

Sweeney's *Recession* photographs bring us into a much more desperate environment as she crawls through the grass after a closed suitcase. Here the violence of her character's world comes to the fore. Although the possibility of whimsy is present in the brilliant hues and backyard setting, the domestic environment, like the counter top upon which Sweeney lies, becomes an ensnaring world from which there seems to be no exit. In another *Recession* shot, we see Sweeney



Tricia Moreau Sweeney, *Untitled*, 1999. Type C Color Photograph. 20" x 30"

from knee to torso as she rises unsteadily from the grass. The implication that she might be reeling from a blow is present, although it is the viewer's job to make this connection after seeing the other photograph.

Ultimately, it is the tension between the subtle implication of violence and the seemingly whimsical approach to this woman's deadly boredom that make Tricia Moreau Sweeney's works so compelling. She affords her viewers a nosy-neighbor's-eye-view: enough so that a "polite" voyeur might glance, raise an eyebrow, and walk past without understanding the seriousness or desperation of the situation. Her character's solitude and victimization

are as quiet as the lives of the women who endure such realities on a daily basis, and whose cries are oftentimes only heard by those who look and listen carefully.

Laura Lark  
Houston, TX  
June, 2002

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TRICIA MOREAU SWEENEY, resides in Houston, TX. She graduated *Cum Laude* with a B.F.A in Visual Arts: Photography / Art History from University of Houston. She has received many awards and scholarships: a fellowship to the University of Illinois at Chicago, School of Art and Design; Women's Studio Workshop, Rosendale, N.Y., Anderson Ranch Art Center, Snowmass, CO., and the University of Houston, Houston, TX. Tricia Sweeney has been in group exhibition since 1998 in Texas and California.

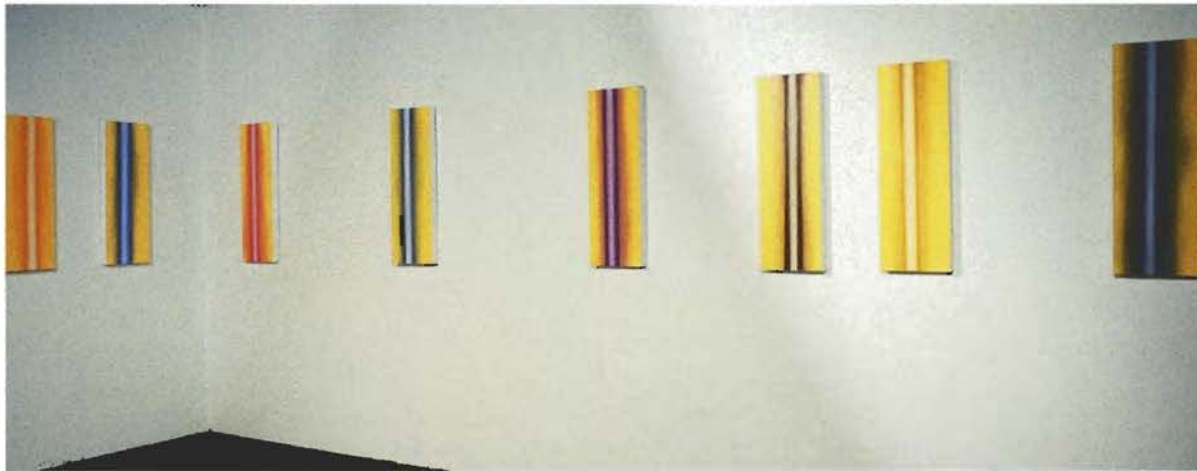


This Panel: Tricia Sweeney, *Self-Portrait*, 1999. Type C Color Photograph. 20" x 30"

Cover Panel: Denise Ramos, *Untitled*, 2001-2002. Alkyd and oil on canvas. 20" x 49"

Back Panel: Denise Ramos, *Installation, Untitled Series (detail)*, 2001-2002. Alkyd and oil on canvas.

Tricia Sweeney, *Self-Portrait: Devoted to Home Duties and Pleasures*, 1998. Type C Color Photograph. 16" x 20"



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Now celebrating its 24th anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,660 artists in 209 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 20 literary readings, and 226 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment

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