

## EXHIBITION REVIEWS

### Susan Weil at Sundaram Tagore Gallery



Susan Weil, **Blue Chair**, 1997, acrylic on aluminum, 72.5 x 55". Image: Courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

**S**usan Weil's paintings, under the title *Motion Pictures*, are world-class pieces by a world-class painter. To see them on a Hong Kong gallery wall is gratifying twice. Not only does the show raise the bar along Hollywood Road and its environs; it also brings out a certain Asian-ness in the work—in its color, some of its subjects, its mix of materials—that one might otherwise have missed.

Weil was born in New York, schooled in Paris, and prominent afterward in the extraordinarily fertile postwar period associated with the New York School. The aesthetic and intellectual thread running through these pieces is thus refreshingly clear. Weil is at once the bearer of Parisian modernism forward and an emissary of New York art in the past decades, if one

could sensibly use this term.

From the Cubists Weil draws an abiding preoccupation with the unfixed-ness of perspective. The exemplary piece here is *Blue Chair*, a 1997 rendering of precisely that from four points of view. The materials are different (acrylic on aluminum), the technique powerfully raw, and the work assertively three-dimensional, but *Blue Chair's* bloodlines

could scarcely locate Weil more evidently among Picasso's mid-century heirs.

From the New York School Weil takes complementary impulses. There is a quickness and freedom with technique and materials that could be rooted only in the lively, exploratory scene below 14th Street in the 1940s and 1950s. She is also much given to fragmentation and action—the capturing of movement on a wall. *Trish Dancing* (2001), a work depicting the dancer Trish Brown, is 17 canvases arranged into a single piece. (Curiously, Weil painted them as four and then cut them up and re-stretched them.) *Sea Birds* (2008), among the most recently rendered, is 12 canvases in the same vein.

One takes a certain truth away from this show, having to do with the strength that derives from an artist's participation in a tradition. This is not a question of either convention or gesture—the enemies of any painter with authentic ambition. "To carry on a tradition, you must add to the tradition," the English novelist D.H. Lawrence once wrote. This is Weil's endeavor. These pieces converse eloquently with what came before them, but they are never less than fully alive.

Weil, at 79 still a denizen of downtown New York, could not grace her Hong Kong debut, she explains in a wall-mounted note to gallery-goers. It is unfortunate. The paintings she sent suggest an artistic presence that is slightly larger than life, a painter fully confident of where she has been, what she is doing, and where she is going. This is a small but powerful show.

Patrick Lawrence