

not do the same for us.

'FOUR' AT THE LIVING ROOM

A secret strength of the San Francisco art scene is fringe galleries -- typically short-lived -- run by artists or others who are in it for love, not money.

One of the newest is the Living Room, which is just that: the front room of [Kelly Lindner's](#) apartment. Nine small paintings by four little-known artists make up the current show there.

[Patrick Wilson](#) and [Robin McDonnell](#) are the standouts. They work in starkly different modes.

Each of Wilson's sleek, foot- square pictures has a cluster of tiny rectangles near its center, some built up into low relief with many layers of paint.

"Bouquet" (1998) tempts us to read its little multicolored shapes on white as Wilson's mental image of some other abstract painting show.

With its satiny, gunmetal finish, "Faith Healer" (1998) shuns depth, taking on almost the presence of sculpture.

McDonnell's paintings are freehand horizontal strokes of yellows, browns and greens that might have been borrowed from the California landscape.

McDonnell's gestures have tremendous follow-through. "Fluid Motion" (1998) reads as if it were a page from a travel journal, as if the intentions the object records stretch far beyond it.

McDonnell evokes painting as a physical discipline for the wandering mind. Her pictures recall [Ralph Waldo Emerson's](#) consoling advice to restless Americans that "truth lies along the highway."

ABSTRACT EXERCISES

ANNE APPLEBY: Recent abstract paintings. Through May 9. [Gallery Paule Anglim](#), 14 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 433-2710.

FOUR: PAINTING IN THE ABSTRACT: Paintings by Grant Hayunga, Robin McDonnell, [Rebecca Morris](#) and Patrick Wilson. Through May 2. The Living Room, 118 Haight St., San Francisco. (415) 437-0452.

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H E A R S T

Appleyby's Colors of Time / Whiffs of nature in abstract works

By **Kenneth Baker** Published 4:00 am, Thursday, April 23, 1998

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What critics admired about reductive abstract painting in the 1960s was its imperviousness to personal and social issues.

Its aloofness meant, though, that abstraction could be -- and soon was -- treated as so much vapid interior decoration.

Today abstract painters such as **Anne Appleyby** still work in the shadow of this dilemma.

Shoring up the surface elegance of Appleyby's recent work at Anglim is a subtext that gives the paintings reasons for being, should we demand them, beyond their obvious pleasures.

On the partition beneath the gallery's central skylight hangs a work in six parts, two vertical tiers of three, titled "Arbor" (1998). The dull and bright greens, foggy blue, reddish brown and straw yellow of these six monochrome panels are subsumed in the palette of grays that pervades the rest of the show. The hues in "Arbor" echo seasonal changes in the aspen trees that surround Appleyby's house in central Montana.

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In themselves these natural changes fascinate her, but she also likes the fact that for native Americans they were markers on a calendar of cultivation and ritual.

Viewers of Appleyby's work who know none of this background may still discover that time is one of her preoccupations.

The impatient will see little here but groups of almost door-size stretched canvases painted in tones of gray.

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Only with time do the paintings sort themselves out: Some radiate light, some absorb it, some seem poised between these possibilities. Blues, greens and reds start to pulse faintly from within panels that at first glance look unnuanced.

Anyone who knows the encaustic -- paintings of **Brice Marden** will think of them here. Like Marden, Appleyby mixes paint with wax to get a "slow" surface that suppresses gesture. But where Marden's monochromes tend to be completely closed spatially, some of Appleyby's hint at the soft depths of twilight air, thick smoke or overcast sky.

The troubling thing about Appleyby's new work is its whiff of theatricality. We have to wonder how much these paintings depend on one another's presence, to what extent the show itself functions as an installation.

The content of Appleyby's art, beyond optics, is its effect on the time one spends looking at it. Her new paintings suffuse that time with subliminal drama, of which our mental lives are already too full because we dwell so much in fantasy. We can easily believe that Appleyby's paintings take her out of herself, but these latest do

