

Several years ago Ann Purcell began painting on small scraps of canvas salvage, which she had been hoarding in her studio. Before this she had painted directly on large Abstract Expressionist canvases. Her best work was sumptuous and psychologically various, full of fresh appropriations of the mannerisms of the New York School. She was radical only in the way her work was so deeply responsive to the original impulse of Abstract Expressionism. Occasionally one could not help be stunned by an uncanny family resemblance, as if she were more a daughter than a disciple to her influences.

Working independently on the canvas scraps, Purcell learned to be fragmentary. She accumulated a great many of these rapidly executed experiments, done freely in the spirit of drawing. Then she began gluing them onto her stretched canvases.

She is unhappy when the word *collage* is used to describe what she does, for she is not combining elements of painting with elements from the world outside painting. She stays within the limitations of formalism, yet she confuses our understanding of those limitations. Within the frame of the larger painting, these smaller paintings are suspended.

In her latest work, exhibited last summer at the Provincetown Group Gallery, the effect can be jarring. The work is deliberately antielegant. In *Bounty Hunter* slashes of black acrylic rip through a shroud of gray, highlighted with silver hardware-store enamel. This primal mist is braced, mysteriously, with what Clement Greenberg (during an unsolicited visit last spring to Purcell's New York studio) calls "patches"—those painted impositions of an alien order which can be notched like totems, as if the color suffered under the stomplings of boots with heavy heels. The organization of her painting is suspended by these interludes, which calm the violence. In Greenberg's homely phrase, these "patches" cover the areas where the canvas has been wounded by poetry.

Ann Purcell was born in Washington, D.C., in 1941. Her first major recognition came when the Corcoran included her in the show *Five Washington Artists* (1976). Four years ago Purcell moved to New York City and showed at Tibor de Nagy. For the past three summers she has been coming to Provincetown, where she rents studio space at the Fine Arts Work Center. The everyday knack of being magical is the contribution of Cape light to her development.

The work of our most exciting younger painters too often uses gimmicks to catch our eye. I am thinking, for example, of Julian Schnabel's recent portrait of Andy Warhol, painted on a canvas of black velvet. Ann Purcell is fresh without being gimmicky. Her notion of risk is the one classically defined by her strongest influences, artists who were capable of generating the kind of respect usually reserved for men of action. Her paintings in this show go far beyond the cocktail party look, demonstrating that to be influenced can also be an act of courage.

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