

CHICAGO

JULIA FISH

RHONA HOFFMAN
GALLERY

During the past ten years, Julia Fish has created paintings and works on paper based almost exclusively on her immediate physical environment. Depicting snippets of sky viewed in different seasons through her studio window, isolating the grids on the siding of a nearby house, or rendering the mosaic tile pattern on the threshold of her doorway, these works teetered between abstraction and representation. Fish offered her household and studio as an inventory of particularized incidents, suggesting ineffable poetry in the thoughtful isolation of things she sees every day. Her work evokes a kind of domestic abstraction, a personal, intriguing type of genre painting that seems purposefully to avoid narrative or intimate revelation.

In a suite of ten gouaches on paper, "[drawings for] Living Rooms," 2002, the artist has attempted to transcribe faithfully "the structural description and floor plan of the living area of my home" at a one-to-twelve scale. Rendered in narrow parallel stripes of mottled warm orange peach tones that resemble the color and shape of floorboards, these studies provide a deadpan view of the physiognomy of her home yet are nonetheless filled with wonder. Taking views of the rooms of her house from above, Fish ignored the walls, doors and closets, making her gouaches into variegated polyquadratic designs that rest on white backgrounds with surprising formal elegance. The form in *South West—one*, for example, has no fewer than thirty-four sides, and trying to puzzle out the architectural causes of its multiple exterior perambulations becomes an exercise in its own right. The artist positions these rooms at different points on her sheets of paper, some high, some low; only after a while does one start, room by room, to



Julia Fish, *[drawing for] Living Rooms NorthEast, 2002*,
gouache on paper, 25" x 22 1/2"

join these images into a continuous chain of space.

Fish identifies these areas only by their points on the compass, orienting her depictions on a north-south or east-west axis. She does not indicate the various sites' functions in her life or share autobiographical details that would reveal where she sleeps, eats, or reads. Her project serves as map, not diary. Indeed, these rooms quickly become both mesmerizing and generic. They create the sense that Fish is only a temporary occupant of their spaces—that people have lived there before her and that more will inevitably follow. But this seems to enhance their cultural implications, the transitory nature of life amid the more permanent spaces that surround us as mute witnesses to the dramas—mundane or not—inexorably played out within them. In her careful accretions of detail, Fish's decontextualized transcription of her house is observant and wise, applicable to environments far afield. These are rooms of her own, but by distilling concrete aspects of their physical profile, Fish touches on the stunningly complex and ultimately expressive nature of home.

—James Yood