
ART REVIEWS

By DAVID PAGEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Shifting Canvas: Julia Fish is a Chicago-based landscape painter whose feathery touch endows the solid objects in her matter-of-fact pictures with a wonderfully understated sense of mystery. At Christopher Grimes Gallery, three modestly scaled, nearly photographic close-ups of a vine-covered brick wall, a red brick walkway and a house's fake brick siding are much more engaging as oils-on-canvas than as real things.

Substances appear to be almost atmospheric in Fish's patiently built-up images. Her delicate paintings do not suggest that the world is on the verge of dissolving or melting down into some hallucinatory stew. Nor do they intimate that it's best to see reality through rose-tinted lenses.

Fish's deliberately out of focus pictures describe a shifting, malleable world that has not yet settled into sharply delineated conventions or stale clichés. Although a trace of Mondrian's stiff, formal armature suffuses her straightforward paintings, they are also shot through with a dose of Seurat's under-appreciated, hands-off pointillism. This influence accounts for the fresh, proto-Pop kick of Fish's haunting images.

Like the 19th-Century Frenchman, whose seemingly unemotional style belied the quiet charge of his art, her tightly restrained paintings open onto common spaces where subjective impressions take shape, finding, in otherwise inhospitable surroundings, a little room for intimacy and individuality.

■ *Christopher Grimes Gallery, 916 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 587-3373, through March 25.*