



VALERIE PATTEN: OCCASIONS, #2, 1986, acrylic paint on canvas, 30" x 20", at Pro Arts, Oakland.

Valerie Patten's exhibition at Pro Arts features over thirty acrylic on canvas

paintings—some modest in scale and some quite large—that depict situations in which the realities of suburban existence seem to be giving way to more surrealistic ones. Common to most of these works is an emphasis on extravagant patterned surfaces and quietly glowing artificial lights operating in an interior space—the zany backdrop for figures musing on absurd circumstances. The nature of this absurdity comes across clearly; it is about the half-conscious realization that “we are amusing ourselves to death” by obsessively ordering and decorating our private arenas in order to obscure the fact that they are psychic prisons. In Patten's ennui-ridden scenarios, whatever pretends to be esthetic (i.e., crazy patterns and cute objects) becomes an esthetic that mesmerizes the human participants into a stupor of inaction. These works are imagistic constructs that provoke both laughter and sadness, and they speak of the soullessness that occurs when the management of effect stifles the manifestation of affect. —Mark Van Proyen