

## Studio Visit with Jim Long, April 2006



Last month I had a chance to visit Jim Long's Soho studio to preview works that will be shown at the Sarah Bowen Gallery.

First I was shown the six "Seasons" (2002), which begin with a solid, quickly applied sign-painter's enamel—each with a different hue. Lighter oil strokes then reflect an imagined, peripheral light source; darker strokes mirror-flip the lighter ones, to make the image jump from the surface, as though the shape has another side to it. But the texture is very clean and flat, in defiance of this trompe l'oeil.

To compliment the "Seasons" are six corresponding studies. They look more like replicas than prototypes, until one notices the subtle shift in color moving from bottom to top. With the solid color determined, and the images crafted, the artist executes the large paintings with sharp confidence.

After Long showed me his recent work, he outlined the beginning of his alchemical experiments. By the late '80s he'd resorted to drawing, in search of something new. While in Italy, he mixed oil paint, water, litho ink, and rubbing alcohol, and dripped by Q-tip.

"I wanted to make something that looked real and random. But these looked too manipulated so I put them away." But the images that resulted between the lines were unexpected and hinted at something he would later work with.

Next out of the drawer was one of the "water circles," a series of paintings from 1991. Here were the same patterns that had resulted in earlier drawings, but this time in sharper detail. He worked the oil paint/water mixture with his hands and then let it drain. Where the oil rested was where the shapes took place and, moving towards the outside, became increasingly dense.

"These gave me a chance to paint something no one else was painting, and that I wasn't doing before. It was an interesting space to paint."

Also at Sarah Bowen will be exhibited "Heaven," which plays with this ever-exponential field. The tone is about sustaining the imprint of a fleeting reaction, one that if you don't stop and stare, you'll never notice.

*David Varno*