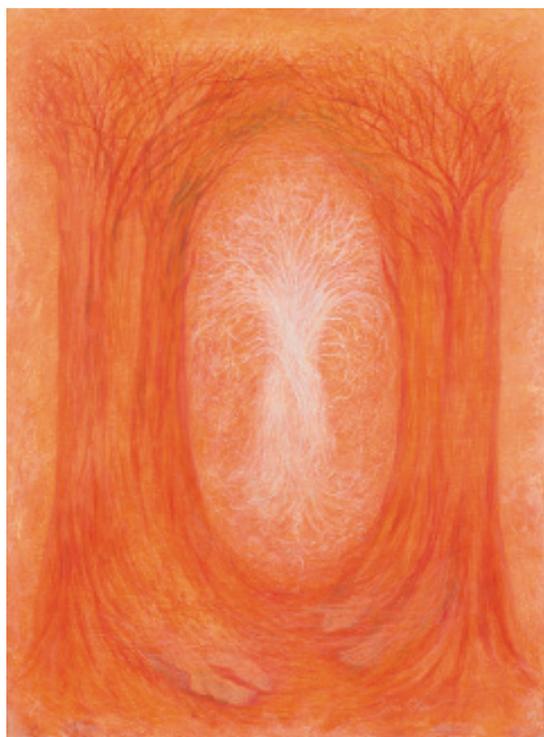


Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Sylvia Fein: *Bound Together*, 2013, egg tempera on board, 40 by 30 inches; at Krowwork.

SYLVIA FEIN

Krowwork

A burst of startling new work by 94-year-old painter Sylvia Fein extends a career already rich with accomplishment. Six of her paintings were a high point of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's 2012 exhibition of women surrealists, "In Wonderland," holding their own with works by the likes of Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Dorothea Tanning. Fein's paintings have a chalky delicacy that seems the result of her exclusive employment of egg tempera, which, as demonstrated in a video accompanying this show, she mixes herself with dry pigment added to a one-to-one formula of egg yolk and water. Despite its thinness, the paint has a dense visual quality that Fein describes as "delicate yet firm," a description that applies to her new paintings' subject matter as well.

At Krowwork, 27 paintings from the past four years included an elegiac tree series made in 2013 after the death of Fein's husband, William Scheuber. In these five works, full-bodied trunks with veinlike branches stand in for Fein or her husband, signaled by human feet that emerge from the trees' bases. Backlit by luminous fields of color, the trees are moving symbols of love's endurance and the organic nature of human relations. Titled with Scheuber's and Fein's initials, the shimmering *W.K.S. & S.F.* presents a single white tree gleaming against a field of bright yellow; among its roots are two pairs of feet, and its peripheral branches are dotted with tiny electrifying dots of orange. In *Bound Together*, the culmination of the series, two trees

with conjoined top branches form an arbor, through which we see two other thick trunks intertwined like vines. Dominated by shades of orange, with the braided trees bone white, this painting vibrates with emotion. Its spare yet evocative symbolism makes it seem the distillation of a page from Jung's *Red Book*.

Other new works are playful explorations of cosmic skies and imaginary planets, all featuring human eyes looking back at us. Pupils, irises and retinal veins are presented as celestial orbs, light rays and energy fields. Fein's painterly renditions of cosmic matter are gorgeously hued in stippled and scratchy brushstrokes, and heightened by flumes of white and gold. A prolific gardener at her home in Martinez, Calif., Fein relates the flux of vision to the transformations of the natural world. *Genesis* (2013) presents an egg-yolk-colored pupil fringed with delicate tendrils of wildflowers. Her vision is eco-generative.

The exhibition, selected by gallery director Jasmine Moorhead and independent curator Travis Wilson, also featured a choice group of early works, including *The Lady and the White Knight* (1942-43), Fein's fantasy portrait of herself and her husband as forlorn medieval lovers, and *Woman Being Carried Away By a Horse* (1954-55), a folk-tale narrative somewhat in the style of an Indian miniature. But the excitement here was with new work that puts a fresh spin on the lush sweetness of Fein's magic realism, grounding fantasy within the purview of garden and sky.

—Michael Duncan