

SPERONE WESTWATER  
257 Bowery New York 10002  
T + 1 212 999 7337 F + 1 212 999 7338  
www.speronewestwater.com

Smith, Roberta. "Malcolm Morley: The Art of Painting." *The New York Times*, 27 May 2005, p. E34.

## Malcolm Morley

'The Art of Painting'

Sperone Westwater  
415 West 13th Street, West Village  
Through June 25

Malcolm Morley has returned to Photo Realism, the style that he extracted from Pop Art in the mid-1960's (as did Gerhard Richter, Robert Bechtle, Richard Artschwager and Vija Celmins). He disliked the term, preferring Superrealism or "fidelity painting." These new paintings are a trifle bland by Mr. Morley's standards, but they continue to prove that fidelity, taken far enough, turns into something else.

Mr. Morley's work has always stressed the tensions between reality, the art of painting and the act of looking. His early efforts were based on glossy postcards of ocean liners, painted in grids one square at a time. The weirdly faceted results reflected his conviction that "painting that doesn't hallucinate is not painting."

Things were considerably more hallucinatory after 1970, when Mr. Morley's surfaces thickened; his canvases were sometimes shaped; his style rifled through Surrealism, Expressionism and illustration; and his subjects included train wrecks, jungles and World War I air battles. His new works, while more restrained, remain action-packed. Based on newspaper photographs of sporting events or accidents, their depictions of violent movement contrast with the grace, detail and silence of the painted, subtly gridded surfaces.

The sense of suspended animation mirrors our comprehension. It takes an instant to organize a bulky swatch of yellow and blue into a rampant ice hockey goalie; or to grasp the gray area behind two cars in "Theory of Catastrophe," an image of an extensive thruway pileup, as blacktop; or to see a cascade of rosy brushwork as a building collapse.

The best paintings of a sports accident depict the Nascar crash in Daytona Beach, Fla., that killed Dale Earnhardt in broad, folded planes, alternately smoke and metal. Mr. Morley's work is always meticulously painted, but never quite put together. That's one of its strengths.

ROBERTA SMITH