

Bio:

Karen Schifano is a painter living and working in NYC. She received a BA in Art History from Swarthmore College, an MFA from Hunter College, and fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. She has exhibited widely in this country, Europe, Australia and Japan. Recent exhibition venues include Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, DC Moore Gallery, Deanna Evans Projects, Rick Wester Fine Arts, MoMA PS1, New Jersey Center for the Visual Arts, Alfred University, CBI Gallery, and Transmitter Gallery. Karen was elected to membership in American Abstract Artists in 2018.

Statement:

I used to be a reductive painter, but now I've changed my spots, so to speak. Over the last 7 or 8 years, I began to make work that has obvious and recognizable references. Instead of fighting the stories that might appear, I decided to start welcoming them in.

Both precedence - where I came from as an abstract painter - and personal influences, have spurred this developing process. Reductive work began to feel too restrictive, and subject matter and metaphor seemed to be ways of funneling in meaning beyond the non-verbal language of painting.

Theater stages, curtains, windows, doorways are my usual ways to begin a painting, and then the rest appears in my mind's eye as I proceed. In retrospect, these shapes and set-ups are kinds of voids with framing devices, a trope that I picked up in graduate school at Hunter College. They are "empty " spaces where things happen or are about to appear. The space usually flips back and forth between positive and negative, so painted shapes become space, and then become things again, and sometimes are simply dripping paint. I like the sense of ambiguity, and therefore, the resulting variety of possible readings. It's all mutable, all energy, all subject to the flow of the moment in front of the canvas. Mortality is very much on my mind, and the pain and sorrow of the world we share, along with the sheer joy in being alive with all of our senses and histories. I hope that these seemingly simple shapes and spaces lead to complex and emotionally resonant conversations.