

The paintings are small—8 by 10 inches each—and depict a single light fixture on a ceiling. The others are larger (11 by 17 inches) and show only a corner where a wall meets the ceiling. The surfaces are monochromatic, and the fixtures are simple globes. Much like the still lifes of Giorgio Morandi—bottles, pitchers, and bowls lined up carefully on a table—they suggest an ordinariness and inconsequence that is disarming. The pictures threaten to fall into nothingness, and yet a strange space and condition remains. Why do they hold our attention if they are so inconsequential?

As Morandi himself said more than a half century ago, “nothing can be more abstract, more unreal, than what we see.” Using the objects of the simple life around him, he questioned our experience of form and space, realizing, like the Cubists before him, that an objective reality and the true essence of an object were not necessarily one and the same. In her ceiling paintings, Cherith Lundin adopts a similar approach to the stuff of everyday life as she investigates that push/pull between representation and abstraction, between the flat painted plane and the space that persists. Her paintings, however, are less about things and more about the condition of space: how we see it, how we experience it, and the psychological dimension that animates these intimate places.

Lundin is no stranger to the minute observation of domestic space. For more than a year, she restricted her artistic practice to drawing—

waking every morning, snapping a photo of the rumpled sheets on the bed she shared with her husband, and drawing that bundle of cotton in pencil, precise and analytical. This daily ritual resulted in the *Atlas* series, which documented the morning routine, a rugged terrain, an ever-changing presence. The metaphor of a bed as the landscape of one's private life was further developed in a large, site-specific drawing of wrinkled sheets that took on the look and feel of roiling seas, uncharted waters, and an unending horizon, a cosmic vision more akin to the paintings of Vija Celmins than Morandi. This painstaking drawing, completed in only two weeks, revealed the heart of Lundin's conceptual practice at the time, the immensity of life found in the most intimate of details: the constant ebb and flow of our existence.

Whereas the *Atlas* drawings were about ritual and time, a clockwork of imagery measured by the rhythms of life, the *Fixture* paintings instead offer a feeling of contemplation, a slow and deliberate inquiry into the creation of space through color. With only the most minimalist points of reference, Lundin's paintings reach to the brink of abstraction without quite falling through. She works meticulously for weeks on each painting, working on several at a time, until they feel complete and substantial. The *Fixture* paintings are smaller and more condensed, each punctuated by a light that concentrates all space and surface around it. In contrast, while the paintings of corners are only slightly bigger, they feel more expansive, more attuned

to the idea of landscape as the blank walls veer off outside the borders of the painting.

The cycle of nature re-enters these contemplative works here as ruminations on the effects of weather on our sense of space. Lundin charges each painting with an atmospheric condition that conveys a sense of breath, air, and substance. Like the barometric pressure that heightens our sense of anxiety and exhaustion on a cloudy day, the paintings contain space for air and light, each offering a different relation to the condensation of matter. If the viewer senses a certain moodiness in the paintings, a feeling of melancholy or calm or agitation, then Lundin accepts these effects as but another way in which the most minimalist of images still can communicate and be expressive.

This fluctuation between order and chaos is reenacted on the gallery walls as each of the *Fixture* paintings is shown in series, one after the other, like variations on a theme. The strict symmetry of the exhibition's walls (12 by 12 feet) and the regularity of the paintings' dimensions are countered by the placement of the light fixtures in each picture—offset, oblique, a hopscotch of orbs and bumps eerily akin to growths on the body. If the viewer connects the dots, a constellation emerges on the gallery walls, reuniting once again the intimate and the infinite. It is this constant and unutterable shift that keeps Lundin's paintings from falling into the void, keeping the wonder of our present spaces alive and well.



Fixture (2007). Oil on canvas, 8 x 10".

CHERITH
LUNDIN