



David Kapp, "Wall Street I, Looking Up," 2013, oil on canvas, 72 x 72".

DAVID KAPP

(Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica) David Kapp's frenetic paintings depict the urgency of urban life. He delights in the colors and shapes of the city and makes paintings that celebrate movement. Kapp, based in New York City, can walk down the street or look out his window for inspiration. He transforms his observations into delightful compositions in which the play between human forms and architecture is paramount. Although he acknowledges the importance of painters like Henri Matisse, Willem De Kooning, Franz Kline, David Park and Richard Diebenkorn, his work is uniquely his own. His paintings, while all urban themed, range from a focus on a particular street corner or intersection, as in "Lafayette Street South," to the bustling crowds crossing the street or waiting in a ticket line.

Kapp paints with wide, flowing gestural brushstrokes — a car, a figure, or a crosswalk is depicted by swatches of impasto color. He observes the urban landscape from above looking down, from below looking up as well as across wide vistas. His works are both impressionistic and expressionistic. They are a carefully observed reality that has been purposefully abstracted. The figures in "Crowd On Silver," painted in bright hues of green, blue, yellow and red-orange are more defined than in many of Kapp's other works. Here, silhouetted male and female figures form vertical columns as they move up and down within the composition. At the

base they are larger and more clearly articulated, becoming quasi-cut outs (a reference to Matisse) near the top of the large canvas. While the who or the where remains a mystery, Kapp has captured the energy of the event.

Walkers, bike riders, and anonymous city dwellers populate Kapp's paintings. His emotionally charged works allude to the excitement as well as the dangers of city life. The loose brushwork implies the controlled chaos, which is exactly what life in the city can be. The geometric shapes that become buildings in "Wall Street III, Looking Up" are both alluring and overwhelming. The negative space, created in tones of white and gray reminiscent of a cloudy day, contrast with the deep blue rectangles that signify buildings. This people-less and car-less work defines a space well known to city dwellers, the shape between buildings that is only seen when looking straight up.

Kapp studies his surroundings and paints distilled moments. Sometimes he moves in close and focuses on a specific detail or event. "Crossing Fifth Ave 1" is such a moment: three featureless figures approach the sidewalk of an intersection, their backs to the street and the passing cars. Have they arrived at their destination? This square image is a fragment from an imagined whole and a moment along their journey. What interests Kapp is the light, the shapes of the city and how they come together in a visually harmonious whole.

While he grew up, was educated and lives in New York City, it is not the only place Kapp depicts. A painting entitled "Santa Monica" features a brighter palette. A buoyant cyan, yellow and green is used to depict a tree-lined street where implied figures or cars are disappearing in a blur of motion. For Kapp, a city, no matter where, is all about constant motion. It is a collection of colors and shapes that beg to be captured, preserved and remembered in the context of an instant. Kapp succeeds in doing just this. He presents an image of the city not as a representational space but as an abstraction full of energy, power and light. For Kapp the city is an entity to be embraced, enjoyed and celebrated for the marvel that it is.

Jody Zellen