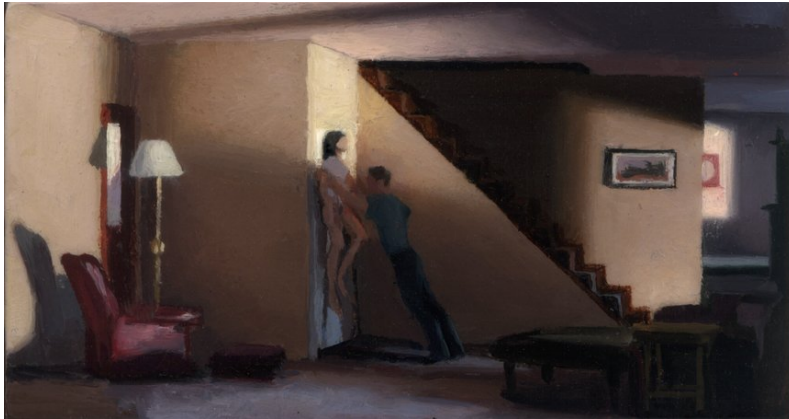


**NEW YORK TIMES**  
**October 7, 2007**

## **Beauty is Back, and Available in Small Sizes**



Amy Bennett: *Against the Wall*, 2006, Oil on canvas, 2 x 3.75"  
Courtesy of the Barry Belkin Collection (Los Angeles)

**by Benjamin Genocchio**

The obsession of the moment in all areas of the art world is painting. As artists and galleries seek an easy sale, and museums chase a wider public, we are knee-deep in pretty, easygoing paintings of one stripe or another.

A two-part exhibition totaling almost 75 works at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art offers one view of contemporary painting from a double perspective, inviting viewers to ponder the relationship between size and quality by grouping small paintings in one gallery and larger ones, often by the same artists, in another.

Lovers of small paintings will delight in "Size Matters XS," a selection of 43 works by 25 artists in the upstairs gallery. Fine pieces are here, many borrowed from galleries and private owners in the United States and Europe, some by artists showing in this country for the first time. A range of styles and techniques are also represented, giving the selection a broad, expansive feel.

If anything comes from this survey it is a sense that beauty is back in vogue, with young artists looking to show off their skills. Witness here the extraordinary precision, skill and delicacy of paintings by Andrew Sendor, Anj Smith, Nigel Cooke and Michaël Borremans, all of whom paint with old-fashioned oils and are superhot with art collectors.

Beyond a concern with beauty, many of the "XS" artists apply a snapshot aesthetic to painting: They seek to encapsulate simple events or scenes that charmed or amused them, much in the same way that the mid-20th-century French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson sought in his work what he called the "decisive moment."

The artists here are curious observers of the lives of average people, paying scant attention to the events of history. Take, for example, Tala Madani, a young Iranian-born artist who makes raw-looking studies of individuals or small groups of figures talking, eating and interacting. They have an enchanting observational quality, capturing the beauty of ordinary moments.

Unfortunately, Ms. Madani's style of painting does not seem to work as well on a larger scale. She has a less successful painting in "Size Matters XXL," a group of 31 large-scale paintings by artists from nine countries on view downstairs in the main gallery.

Some artists here can work on a bigger scale. Others, especially those with an eye for subtle detail and surface texture, are better suited to smaller, more intimate works; expanding the size of their pictures usually leads to a loss of quality and definition. Almost all the paintings downstairs belong to Marc and Livia Straus, founders of the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art. Mr. Straus is also the curator of these shows, a fact that no doubt accounts not only for the crossover in artists but also in taste; many paintings here feel like larger versions of the smaller ones upstairs, although there are some other, more unusual works as well.

Something unexpected, and technically not really a painting, is Daniel Buren's wall-size installation of bright blue painted cubes arranged in a checkerboard pattern, with his signature stripes running down the sides. It is a terrific piece of conceptual art, and the first thing you see when you enter the building. The problem is that it has very little in common with many of the other paintings installed around it.

Seduction seems to be the goal of much of the larger work on display here, drawing us in either through voyeuristic sexuality, melodrama, saturated color or sheer size. Radical without being revolutionary, these pictures basically want to be liked. It is easy to comply.

"Size Matters: XXL — Recent Large-Scale Paintings," through spring 2008, and "Size Matters: XS — Recent Small-Scale Paintings," through Nov. 10. The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 1701 Main Street, Peekskill. Information: (914) 788-7166 or hvcca.com.