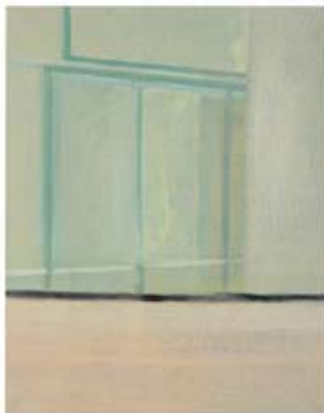# Ilse D'Hollander
KONRAD FISCHER GALERIE

The Belgian painter Ilse D'Hollander died in 1997 at the age of twenty-nine, and her work has seldom been exhibited since. She began painting in Ghent, where her earliest works were still lifes and portraits inspired by Cézanne and Nicolas de Staël. Her close relationship with her mentor Raoul De Keyser, an abstract painter who favored a style that was at once intuitive, economical, and ever so subtly referential, preceded (and predicted) her gradual transition to a similar brand of abstraction around 1995, about the same time that she moved a half hour's drive outside of Ghent to the rural town of Paulatem. There, in the last two years of her life, she created a small but formidable body of work that was granted its first real outing in a retrospective in 2013 at the M - Museum Leuven in Belgium.

Ilse D'Hollander,
Untitled (#25), 1996,
oil on canvas,
27⅛ x 21⅜".

It's unclear what prompted this sudden flowering of interest in D'Hollander, but we should be grateful for it. At Fischer, in the first solo presentation of the artist's work in Germany, the cohesive grouping of twenty-seven oil paintings and nine smaller gouaches from the artist's estate, all but two of them *Untitled*, invited viewers to take pleasure in aesthetic experience, to look at these seemingly simple compositions long enough to observe how surprisingly lively they are. The works were arranged so that they vacillated between flashes of legibility, as in the crudely rendered fence post against a sunset in *Untitled* (#324) (all works cited, 1996), and pure abstraction. Where representation recedes, painterly whimsy, supported by a palette dominated by soft pastels and muddy earth tones, takes over. In *Untitled* (#298), oddly biomorphic black shapes bordered with white highlights play across a mint-colored canvas, like organisms swimming in an algae-tinged pond, while a wispy pink trail of smoke floats over squares of off-white and baby blue in *Untitled* (#290).

That dynamism was echoed throughout the exhibition, attributable in part to the visible and directional brushstrokes that give D'Hollander's paintings the feel of sketches or studies but without making them seem rushed or merely gestural. The fields of color in *Untitled* (#11) and *Untitled* (#112) appear at first to mind their own business, each unobtrusively occupying its own section of the canvas. But a viewer's roaming eye quickly notices spots where bordering fields erupt into one another, color exceeding the boundaries of form; or where layers of darker underpainting rise up and disrupt the uniformity of the surface; or where swift brushstrokes applied right to left create the sensation of expansion and movement where there is none. Still other works, such as *Untitled* (#10), force the viewer to wonder what distinguishes line, form, and color at all: When do brushstrokes cohere into recognizable shapes, and when are they, by virtue of calling attention to their very application, "merely" evidence of the painter dragging a pigment across the canvas?

These close considerations of painting's most basic components are what merit the comparisons between D'Hollander (in the tiny fistful of texts on her work) and De Keyser and de Staël, a group to which I would add Philip Guston and Richard Diebenkorn, both of whom delighted in the formal play of abstract composition and shared D'Hollander's penchant for milky, desaturated color. D'Hollander died too young to have articulated a similarly robust, distinctive, and varied approach to abstraction, but the modesty of the paintings she did leave behind is one of their greatest virtues.

—*Andrea Gyorody*

MILAN

Dieter Roth and Björn Roth
HANGARBICOCCA

"Islands," which comprises one hundred works in 48,000 square feet of demanding postindustrial space and marks Vicente Todolí's trial run as HangarBicocca's artistic adviser, is a massive show, big enough to encompass Dieter Roth's total lifetime undertaking of smashing and annihilating boundaries, whether temporal, spatial, or conceptual.