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## ART REVIEW; AFFIRMING VIBRANT FREEDOM OF METHOD

by Phyllis Braff

This 47-year painting overview does much to clarify the career of the Iranian-born, Paris and New York-educated, Manoucher Yektai, who now divides his time between Sagaponack and Manhattan. The exhibition demonstrates, for example, how the timely ideas he explored within the milieu of Abstract Expressionism served as roots for the gestural applications of thick pigment that have long been part of his work. Tracing such concerns from the 50's tends to make the subsequent technical and thematic variations seem stronger.

In "Open Window," 1951, the vertical slabs of color stand apart as if they were collage elements. One is impressed, too, by the way the scale of these separate paint units contributes to the impact. This calls attention to Mr. Yektai's decisions about effective scale in his swift crusty forms from later decades.

A 1954 still life, "The Yellow Curtain," suggests the range of Mr. Yektai's experiments with portraying an image through the action of his materials. The irregular, heavy paint is held in controlled paths in one section, but in another is more akin to a sudden freezing of random applications and seems to be just one step before process art. Responding to the paint activity seems instinctive, and there is a constant sense of suspension between this and the shift to grasp a motif, like a foreground bouquet. One feels this keenly in the more memorable later canvases like "A Body of Landscape" and "Sagaponack Corner," a work that emphasizes sensuous responses to nature and recalls the spirit of Willem de Kooning.

Affirming both familiar images and vibrant freedom of method can be hard to balance, and some canvases are more successful than others. There are instances when a full figure can seem to be an intrusion, although everything integrates well in "Concierge."

Picking up on the intense physicality and invented topography, some paintings from the 80's and 90's seem more objectlike. The surface character of "Sagaponack Corner" is close to that of a gleaming ceramic, and in "Road to the Water," interest focuses on the way high peaks reflect light and create artificial patterns.