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Installation view of the Geneva exhibition – In Anticipation of Women's History Month – Photo: Gunnar Meier

## Rochelle Feinstein, Witty Abstraction

By Judicaël Lavrador, special correspondent to Geneva

The Centre d'art de Genève offers a panorama of works by the American artist, between self-deprecation and irony.

The dim spotlights insist a little, but not too much, on enlivening the iridescent colored canvases suspended on wooden hooks in the middle of one of the rooms in the Centre d'art Contemporain de Genève. The abstraction of Rochelle Feinstein is neither arrogant nor cold. Her personal task is to warm up as best she can this genre of painting, to which art history has given so much credit, but which struggles today to pay its due. In other words, pictorial abstraction could be visionary, rebellious, insolent, gracious, dreamlike; then, in the more standard way, cubist, minimal, geometric, optical ...

**Gymnastics.** But these days, we no longer know what to invent, nor how to justify this esoteric practice. So, we search. Certain artists, at least – including Rochelle Feinstein, Professor at Yale, born in 1947 – search with a multitude of questions in mind but with only modest paintbrushes in hand, freely admitting fault, seeking neither to deceive nor impress, but not wanting to bore the viewer either. Rochelle Feinstein’s painting is located here, between the need to entertain and the need to risk everything, ready to make a mistake, recognize it, beg pardon, but to continue on at all costs. *I Made a Terrible Mistake*, the installation with the spotlights, showcases this dilemma by referencing, in its title and on canvas, both Michael Jackson, the king of pop (and the gaffe), who in 2002 tepidly apologized for suspending his baby over a Berlin balcony, and Barry White, who never wanted to appear sorry for anything, least of all for his tumultuous love life.

In her search for the meaning that abstract painting can have today, Rochelle Feinstein necessarily crosses paths with her predecessors. These are mostly men, who according to art history, transformed expressionist painting into a virile gymnastic. The exhibition is ironically titled, “In Anticipation of Women’s History Month,” the equivalent of Women’s Day for Anglo-Saxon countries. Feinstein mocks this time slot generously allotted to women artists. In the show, she makes pins for the occasion with the colors of a Helen Frankenthaler painting, one of the rare female abstract expressionists to know success in her lifetime. Like her, Feinstein does not wait for her own death to create her legacy, or her “Estate,” the collection of works that remain to be sold (and that sell better) when an artist dies. The fifteen works gathered under the title *The Estate of Rochelle F.* are frustrated. They are what the artist made with what was left in her New York City storage unit, which she was forced evacuate when the rent tripled and she could no longer afford to pay it.

**Tones.** Attempting to surpass painterly machismo, then the venality of the art market, Feinstein checks all the boxes by offering the viewer the same polite compliment s/he was prepared to offer her: *Love Your Work*. But these canvases, with the words “I love your work!” written backwards, are not simply ironic, because the phrase can be pronounced in different tones – sincere, spontaneous, affected, or stilted. It’s the tone that tips the scales. The same goes for abstraction. For Rochelle Feinstein, what is most important in an abstract painting is the tone. Her tone, which she has found, perhaps invented, is self-deprecation in abstraction.