

Arts

EXHIBITIONS MOVIES BOOKS SHORT LIST



Brushworker Painter
Lesley Vance in her
Los Angeles studio



Untitled (14) (2009)

Lesley Vance

PAINTER

Yes, there are still artists who do that venerable thing called painting, and some even do it for the pleasures only paint can deliver. Lesley Vance's pictures are compact and luscious but produced with a tough-mindedness that knows the difference between beautiful and pretty. They have the warmth and compressed drama of 17th century Spanish still life—one of her acknowledged models—as well as a feeling of pressure and release that reminds you of the British painter Howard Hodgkin. Again and again, she arrives at old-fashioned painterly beauty, its ragged flag still flying. To get there, Vance sets up still-life arrangements of things like rocks and shells in her Los Angeles studio. Then she photographs them and works from the photo, using brushes and palette knives to drag pigment into flickering formations in which only trace elements of the original scene remain. In the completed canvas, the familiar world has been transformed, but its properties of light, volume and surface still flourish. *Cabinet pictures* was the term once used to describe paintings like these, with their intimate scale and lovingly administered paint. That term won't do. It makes the pictures sound small, and Vance's are anything but. ■