Noël Skrzypczak
Dark, Shiny
Neon Parc, Melbourne
6 September – 30 September 2006

With their palette of black and murky shades of green-grey, titles like *Rain my rage on the opposite shore*, and a catalogue essay that speaks of transcendence and Titian, I am not sure that I am meant to find the latest abstractions by Noël Skrzypczak so funny.

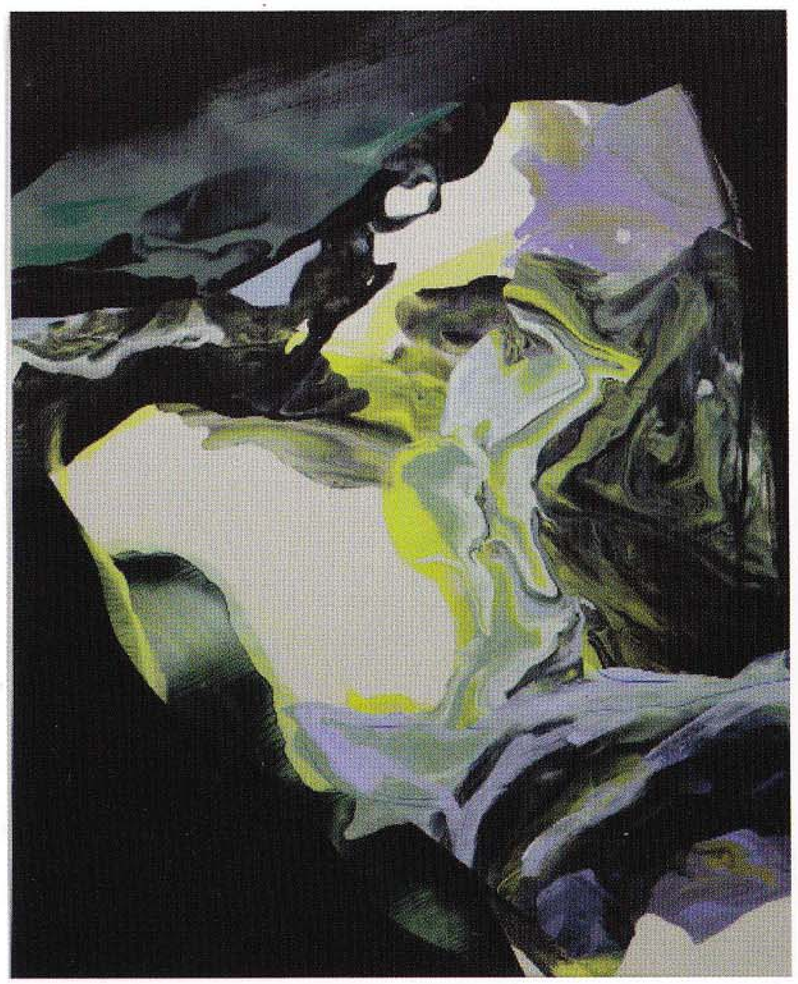
The series of works shown at the new Melbourne gallery Neon Parc extend Skrzypczak's previous experiments with gestural drips of paint. Unlike her grandiose wall works (discussed in my article in *Eyeline* #56, and recently featured in the group exhibition 'Uncanny Nature' at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art) this exhibition features ten smaller easel sized works.

Skrzypczak continues to demonstrate exceptional control over her perilous palette: black and grey curdle with fluorescent yellow, buttery cream, bottle green, teal and eau de nil, and the more over-the-top pictures entangle rumpus room hues of mushroom and lavender. Muted washy backgrounds, with the occasional suggestion of underpainting, provide an unobtrusive foil for the gaudy applied arrangements. The overall effect is a flamboyant kind of Gothick very much in the spirit of Pollock—at once gaudy and gloomy—with grandiose literary titles to match.

But all is not what it seems. Skrzypczak has made what are, in effect, convincing simulations of abstract paintings. While they initially appear to be made from paint flung, poured, dripped and smeared on to the canvas in a flurry of emotional intensity, closer inspection reveals that they are, for the most part, a kind of avant garde decoupage. As with previous works, Skrzypczak makes and manipulates her abstract dribbles on Perspex, peeling the skins of fast-drying acrylic and attaching them to the support.

Right down to the corners of the canvas where the applied paint pieces are neatly folded over like a wrapped present, the meticulous materiality of these works is concealed under their splashy lost-at-sea chaos. With swirling marble effects and wave-like looping, the paint pieces look as though they have landed on the canvas only after some fleeting mid-air ballet. Once on the wall, the edges of each carefully poured and elongated puddle effectively suggests the whiplash lines of fast-flung paint.

The illusion is convincing, with one exception. For *Waiting through lives and past-lives*, perhaps deliberately the last work one encounters at Neon Parc,



left to right: **Noël Skrzypczak**, ***Dark, shiny*, 2006**. Acrylic on polycotton, 100 x 80cm. Private collection; ***The Swing*, 2006**. Acrylic on polycotton, 100 x 80cm. Private collection. Image courtesy the artist and Neon Parc.

Skrzypczak flips her usually flat peelings of paint so that their subtle meniscus and raised edges reveals the method of production. The difference between looking at a painting, as opposed to just looking at paint, is suddenly exposed. It is a satisfying revelation, that forces the viewer to return to the other pictures to unpick the trickery of Skrzypczak's techniques. The punchline of the exhibition is two small works titled *Study for Dark, Shiny #1* and *Study for Dark, Shiny #2*. *Dark, Shiny* is the large central picture in the previous room, and the sight of these small canvases compels the viewer to return to it to track its genesis. But as elsewhere in the exhibition, Skrzypczak challenges our expectations. The two studies seem to be the only paintings, at least in the conventional sense, in the exhibition.

The exhibition of these studies provides a nice conundrum. If *Dark, Shiny* was the expressive gestural abstraction made in a flurry of emotional intensity that it appears to be, the idea of exhibiting two small studies is a bit surprising. It is hard to imagine, for instance, New York School painters making tentative miniature tests before they embarked on their epic canvases, let alone exhibiting them.

But there is little left to chance in Skrzypczak's collage process. Given her singular ability to pick up the paint and move it around to arrive at the desired composition, the idea of executing a traditionally painted study is even more eccentric. Further, that the pictures are each so dissimilar, and that the large painting is portrait rather than landscape in its orientation, suggests they have been concocted at least partly to provide the finale for Skrzypczak's shrewd painterly charade.

Not everyone will approach these handsomely moody pictures with such scepticism, but these abstractions have a restrained technical gimmickry that renders their expressive efforts a whole lot smarter than it might at first appear. For those viewers who unpick their materiality, these ab ex riffs turn out to be as saturated with conceptual cunning as they are with turbulence and torment.

Alex Taylor