



AT THE GALLERIES

by Karen Wilkin | Winter 2026

Susannah Phillips, Untitled, 2024, oil on canvas, 30 x 46 inches

It's not an overstatement to describe the past season as a celebration of inventive painters who are women. There were noteworthy shows by male artists, as well, but those by women far outnumbered them, starting with "Susannah Phillips: New Paintings" at Bookstein Projects, on the Upper East Side. Phillips offered a variety of mostly intimate views of the studio with a few larger works. The geometry of an easel, shelves, windows, doorways, and leaning canvases became potent, loosely indicated suggestions of a painter's workspace—images that casually emphasized geometry and threatened to turn into abstractions, if we looked away. One almost black-and-white, modestly sized, horizontal canvas was so explosive that it was legible as an interior only because it was surrounded by works with more specific allusions. Phillips keeps the planes of her nominal subject matter parallel to the surface of the canvas, provoking memories of classical friezes that enrich the quotidian basis of her images.

Most of the studio paintings were crepuscular gatherings of not-quite grays, brown-taupes, and off-whites that evoked walking into a dimly lit room; at times, we were momentarily disoriented, as we would be in the real experience, but we regained our balance because of the sturdy verticals and horizontals of the easel and the emphatic rectangle of a window. Other paintings, boldly slashed with warm ocher or orange, were sunlit or had the lights turned on. The view of the studio was similar but slightly different in each canvas, so that the series was both eye-testing—have I seen this before?—and rewarding, as broadly indicated planes conspired to be read as workspace furnishings and then made us consider them as inventive, non-referential structures. One can only applaud Phillips’ audacity in taking on a time-honored theme and turning it into something completely personal, not only updating a conventional motif, but also making it fresh and compelling—and a little mysterious.