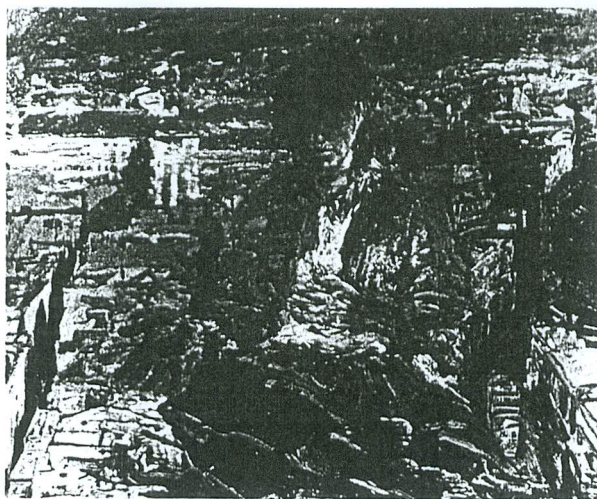


ARTFORUM:

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Simon Edmondson, *Alternatives*, 1984, oil on canvas, 70 × 84".

handling from other artists. If his influences do not yet seem fully digested, it should not be surprising. He is a young artist—29 years old—who seems to be working hard, to judge by the labor in his canvases, without rushing things.

The central intuition of Edmondson's work is that painting preserves textures of experience that are increasingly unavailable elsewhere in the contemporary world. The mingling of matter and imagination that only painting can effect is his constant theme. The difficulty he seems to have, the area in which his work looks most effortful, is in contriving images that will set the process of painting free without resort to abstraction. Edmondson's work is least coherent at the level of recognizable imagery, even when the details of his painting are beautifully sustained. *Alternatives*, for example, is typical in centering on a human figure, in this case a seated woman. Her form, sketchily defined in strokes of bright red, floats ambiguously above and in front of a vast, dim cityscape. Questions about the figure's relationship to the cityscape are mooted by the loose paint-handling that connects them, but they are troubling all the same—not because they intimate ominous answers, but because of a sense that the artist himself is unsure of what he's doing with the inscrutable figures that populate his work. Occasionally, as in *New Flag*, 1983, the entanglement of the figures in the picture space seems to be erotic, but for the most part the ambiguities that fill Edmondson's work seem willfully obscure, even where they seem to have developed directly from the process of painting. This impression is reinforced by his use of color, particularly the re-

liance on black that often seems to be a way of withholding from a picture and from us viewers the light needed to grasp what we're seeing imaginatively.

In spite of these arguably problematic aspects, Edmondson's pictures constantly cast one back upon one's perceptions of paint on canvas. And because his way with paint is fluent and physically generous, there is much to see even where there may be nothing that can be thought about clearly.

—KENNETH BAKER

#### SIMON EDMONDSON

Simon Edmondson's paintings are educated work. They are loaded with respectful allusions to artists he evidently admires, from Frank Auerbach (*Asleep in the Daytime II*, 1984) and Oskar Kokoschka (*Alternatives*, 1983–84) to Philip Guston and Christopher LeBrun, who seem to haunt everything he makes. Edmondson plainly understands painting as a process of assimilation, for there is a colleguely feeling about all his adaptations of technique and image-