



# Jennifer Wolf at William Turner Gallery

**By Peter Frank**

Painters, not least in the United States, have been "going with the flow" since the dawn of abstraction. Waves of pigment, spreading across and even saturating the canvas, were loosed by no less than Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove early in the twentieth century and, in its latter half, painting as tidal efflux became a fundament of post-abstract expressionism, passed from Helen Frankenthaler to (most prominently) Morris Louis, and even arrogated as a signature style by (first among others) Paul Jenkins. Post-minimalist artists such as Dorothea Rockburne and Helene Aylon stained their supports-canvas, cardboard, burlap, with everything from olive oil to crude.

With such a pedigree, current flow painters must struggle that much harder to do something visually, and conceptually, distinctive. Suzan Woodruff, for example, concocts vivid landscape-type spaces from elemental conjunctions of deep, rich color. For her part, Jennifer Wolf (Woodruff's "co-gallerist") shies away equally from rainbow palette and representational inference. While Woodruff is ultimately concerned with the pictorial result of her method, Wolf conversely posits her churning, nebulous formations as metonyms at the service of her process. Their earthy tonalities, and predominance of earthy hues, do not simply conjure soil and substance; they literally contain such.

Indeed, the greater part of Wolf's efforts are spent on collecting mineral coloring in various corners of the globe, from Malibu to Rio de Janeiro to southern France. Back in her studio, Wolf grinds these into pigments. In previous work, she would suspend the powders in hide glue and, letting them gush and ooze across the canvas, would of necessity fix them with a coat of varnish, like some Dutch master. These latest paintings, however, switch out the varnish for acrylic polymer. So long, darkly charming anachronism; hello, bright expansiveness.

Of course, it could be argued that Wolf has simply exchanged old-master means for modernist, but the issue is not her conjuration of the distant or recent past; it is her exploitation of exotic and homely materials alike in the realization of what can only be called a gritty luminosity. In comparison with the brittle, surface-suppressing varnish, the polymer, with its even luster, enhances rather than impedes the fluidity of Wolf's media. Instead of clotting and pooling, the increasingly large, ambitious stretches of pigment, blooming with halations, now seem to be in continual flux. As a result, perhaps ironically, perhaps deliberately, Wolf's current work satisfies the demands of the eye as never before, even while continuing to fulfill the given rules of her process.

Peter Frank is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

"Jennifer Wolf: Ground" closed November 13 at William Turner Gallery, Santa Monica