

## ART REVIEW

# Phillips gets less sensuous

## And Pamela Wilson opts for the representational

By Alan G. Artner

Tribune art critic

John Phillips' recent abstract paintings at the Bodybuilder & Sportsman Gallery are as good-natured as his earlier work on view, though in size and quirkiness of form they are also more ambitious.

Gone are the hooked lines and stylized ribbons with which the artist long has worked. Also gone is the seductive oil-and-wax surface. In their place are networks of biomorphs and tubes that evoke 1950s design elements and thereby create a barrier to being immediately accepted as the stuff of serious contemporary art.

Time and again, however, scrutiny reveals just how meticulously these canvases are constructed, despite the apparent jokey appeal to the past in their form and color. Always they are careful, intelligent paintings that deceive by looking lightly comedic. They're not about irony but a supremely good nature.

Still, the smaller, earlier pieces on view indicate greater economy combined with an irresistible sensuousness. Phillips' command of color is there already complete, and I particularly like the presence of a gemlike aura that balances the artist's ever-present humor.

No doubt part of the idea behind the newer work was to abandon anything that could appear as easy seduction in favor of initially dis-



Pamela Wilson is now a representational painter, though works such as her "Pink House," which can be seen at the Monique Meloche Gallery, have an underlying abstract structure.

arming the viewer through clunkiness. It succeeds, but for now, at least, something mighty appealing seems to have been lost. The next exhibition will tell us more.

*At 119 N. Peoria St., through March 16. 312-492-7261.*

### Pamela Wilson

Pamela Wilson may be remembered by Chicagoans as an abstract painter, though that changed since she moved to San Francisco almost three years ago. In her works at the Monique Meloche Gallery, she now is a representational artist, painting from photographs of her immediate surroundings as well as news-media images of national and international import.

This is not as big a leap as it sounds, given that some of Wilson's abstractions suggested they were painted from nature. In any case, the interiors and views from her windows have a geometric purity that indicates the subjects are of less interest than how the artist treats them, and Wilson's treatment emphasizes underlying abstract structure.

When her subjects come from news photo-

graphs, an affinity with minimal abstraction is less apparent, in part because she favors teeming crowd scenes. Still, her pictures of riots or demonstrations are clearly formal studies drained of emotion. And her transcription of George W. Bush addressing the multitudes during his inauguration speech is more "about" patterns in landscape than storytelling or memorializing a moment from contemporary history.

The sensuousness Wilson allows herself comes through color combined with a softness of image related to her photographic sources. This happens to best effect in the interiors, withholding the work from what otherwise might be perceived as Puritan severity.

*At 951 W. Fulton St., through March 12. 312-455-0299.*

### 'Each Other'

As a sequel to last year's portrait exhibition at the Flatfile Photography Gallery, director Susan Aurinko has paired 24 artists from her stable for a group show of photographic portraiture. Each member of each pair had to create