

# ART

## Figures

Ellen Lubell

Shirley Gorelick  
Soho 20

99 Spring St. (through April 19)

Shirley Gorelick has often devoted her considerable talents as a figure painter to repeated studies of one person or one group. For her latest show, she has painted Gunny and Lee Benson, a fiftyish-looking, middle-class couple, ordinary except that Gunny, the woman, is afflicted with muscular dystrophy. Though she is seen in a wheelchair in several of the paintings, she is herself a family therapist.

Because Gorelick's interest is in the relationships between the individuals, and between the people and their environments, she moves her subjects around — composing each picture with a different emphasis, changing the light — all in an effort to know these people better. The expressive components of her paintings are all inexorably directed to the effort at "psychoportraiture," and do not distract from our involvement with her subjects. Her intense, directional lighting is suggestive of photos, though her dry but creamy handling of the paint lends a subtle painterliness to the wholes.

*Gunny and Lee*, severe in composition and coloration, seems to emphasize the drama of Gunny's affliction and her husband's tense concern. The other works are more matter of fact, and dwell on other aspects of their lives. Two paintings depict Gunny in her wheelchair, and her husband's juxtaposition to his wife in that situation — in that role.

Gorelick's silverpoint drawings are even more intense psychological portraits. They all have a haunting, ethereal quality, like ghosts that have just materialized in our dimension. Gunny's face reveals pain in these drawings. The artist is supremely accomplished in this medium, executing the drawings on canvas, which contributes to their unusual, though regular, texture.

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This is probably Gorelick's most consistent and successful painting show to date. Her tough, unromantic paintings forgive nothing and present subjects as she finds them — all faults, all humanizing factors intact. She deserves consideration with the leading figure painters of the day.



Gorelick's *Gunny and Lee I*

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