

## Deftly utilizing forms of light

By Leah Ollman

Patti Oleon calls her new paintings at Hunsaker/Schlesinger Fine Art "Light Fiction," and the description may be more apt even than she intended. The works are fictive (as all paintings inherently are) and light prevails as both subject and form, so the term is a clean fit.

But it's also slightly dismissive, and that sense of the term applies here too. The paintings aren't as frothy as beach novels, but they're not "Ulysses," either.

Scenes of elegant interiors bathed in light, they abound in small, beautiful passages and acute observations. They don't expand or redefine the genre but work modestly within it.

Oleon, based in San Francisco, paints places made for public delectation -- hotel lobbies and period rooms in museums, grandly appointed with velvet upholstery, ornate moldings and crystal chandeliers. Emptied of people, the rooms feel hushed, frozen.

The sole sense of presence is provided by light -- the warm glow from a wall sconce or, more often, sunlight bursting through the edges of a window or door frame with brilliant white intensity. Oleon makes smart use of warm/cool contrasts and blue/orange complementary tonalities to make her compositions hum.

She renders the bright sheen of sunlight on slick wood floors with agility and revels in the ordinary magic that light practices all around us, turning familiar forms into abstract conglomerations of shapes and shadows. Her work draws upon a rich heritage of light-oriented painting, bringing to mind the stillness and staging of Vermeer and the meditative luminosity of Rothko. She holds back from their depth and inventiveness, however, opting instead to keep things light.