



ART

RUTH PASTINE'S PAINTINGS ASTOUND

DOUGLAS BRITT AT 12:40 PM ON NOVEMBER 10, 2010

If there's been a more soulful painting show in a Houston gallery this year, *Ruth Pastine: Present Fugitive* just erased it from my memory.



Ruth Pastine, *Flash*, from the *Blue-Orange Present Fugitive* series, 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

A painter of breathtakingly subtly shifting fields of complementary colors, Pastine lives and works in Southern California, and a couple of the most subversive works on view conjure up thoughts of that region's 1960s "Finish Fetish" movement, only to complicate that impression while it's still forming.

These systematic, obsessively layered works are highly finished, to be sure, and there's something fetishistic about the care Pastine lavishes upon them. But their seduction begins, rather than stops, at the surface, as these resolutely handmade, process-driven paintings call forth a spiritual intensity that's light-years away from the Finish Fetishists' airbrushed appeal.

This work isn't about plastics or California culture; it's about painting — period. It evokes the kinds of primal responses only oil paint can, especially when it's handled as only Pastine can.

Especially astounding is the way Pastine makes paintings using the same warm-cool color combinations achieve wildly different looks and evoke totally different emotions. (Photos don't begin to hint at the works' subtlety or beauty; you simply have to see them for yourself.)



Ruth Pastine, *Beyond*, from the Blue-Orange Present Fugitive Series, 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

Whichever museum gives Pastine her first survey is going to look awfully smart: Here's hoping it's in Houston.

Ruth Pastine: Present Fugitive continues through Dec. 31 at [Gallery Sonja Roesch](#).