

low while the eye soars in a shadowed out
abyss. As you gaze into this darkness, the
lit areas impact on your peripheral vision,

variety, it feels like a spice of the mid-
'90s and the Middle Ages.

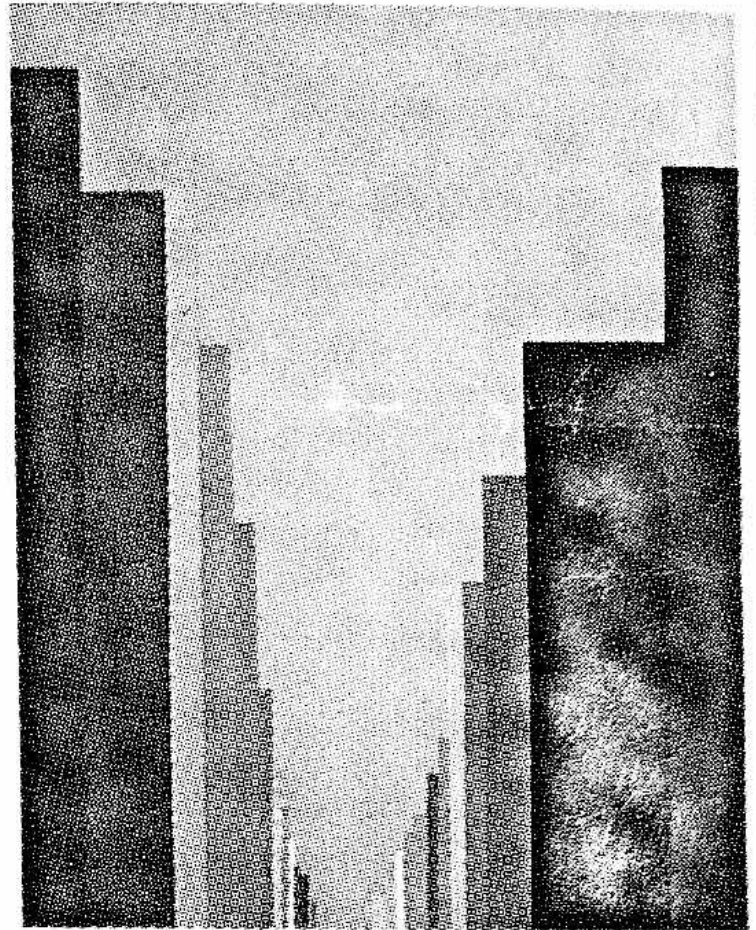
Martin Herbert

Laura Owens

Sadie Coles (Upmarket)

Laura Owens enlarges, but not necessarily enhances, the type of pastel print found in hotel lobbies or dentists' waiting rooms; to complete the experience, there ought to be some sort of Muzak playing. In a large painting of a sunset, washy mauves contrast with foreground rocks, painted in a thicker brown, and a glossy band of cobalt sea. Thicker still, a straight-from-the-tube dump of orange and red denotes the last rays of the day. A translucent vertical suggests that this is indeed being viewed from a hotel window. It may also correspond with the gallery architecture, a feature that locates the image somewhere between the real and the imagined. For Owens, the near monochrome is an arena in which different types of pictorial space can be floated; a room within a room that fuels the refractive effect. A gallery interior is rendered in blocks of colour, only the edges of a few paintings are visible and these have been filled in with uncustomary detail.

But, in many ways there is too much going on. A potted tree, with carefully drawn branches and leaves is surrounded by splurges of green and blue and pink dotted with orange. The additions specu-



late a more painterly activity but remain extraneous. Unsure whether these are deeply ironic (a dig at West Coast blandness) or deadly serious (there are shades of Helen Frankenthaler, Richard Diebenkorn and, at a push, even Barnett Newman and Matisse here), I found these annoying, slippery paintings to misfire. This soft and airless formalism could be honed still further. *Martin Coomer*