



Panel No. 7 from "The Swift Transitions of Towns" by Flora Natapoff.

Natapoff's powerful scroll-like acrylics

PERSPECTIVES

By Christine Temin
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Flora Natapoff's new acrylic-on-paper paintings unfurl like scrolls or banners. Most of the 14 works in this show called "The Swift Transitions of Towns," — at the Barbara Krakow Gallery, 10 Newbury St., through Oct. 29 — are about 20 inches high and 20 feet long. Some even turn the corners on the gallery walls.

Natapoff, who used to teach at Harvard and has lived in London since 1983, paints the East London neighborhood where she works, an area populated by East Indian and Caribbean immigrants. She makes the faces of these people virtually expressionless, as if they had been clubbed into a loss of feeling. Their features, often reduced to quick gashes of paint, look as set as stone. The faces confront us in the foreground of the paintings, while the bleak, crowded buildings and stalls of open-air markets are pushed to the back. The buildings are even more anonymous than the people: Only occasionally does an architectural detail — the curve of a stairway, or a pointed arch that might belong to a church window — assert itself. A few spindly trees are the only sign of nature. Natapoff's streaky, blotchy application of a rich palette of neutrals, ranging from terra cotta to khaki to dirty yellow, creates a cloud of urban dirt blanketing and obscuring everything. It's a contemporary version of Whistler's romantically foggy London.

The extreme length of the works suggests the seeming endlessness of the most cheerless parts of London. The banner format also creates a cinematic effect, but without any cinematic narrative. The works don't demand to be read from left to right or right to left, any more than a complicated real-life street scene dictates a particular reading. The



A detail from Natapoff's "Pensive Line," 1983.

20-inch height necessitates a dramatic cropping — we see only the tops of a row of cars stuck in a traffic jam — that adds to the sense that the pictures offer a literal "slice of life." Natapoff had long been interested in oriental scroll paintings, but her own use of the form is rooted in physical necessity. She has multiple sclerosis and can no longer stand up to paint large works.

This is a powerful body of work, made more powerful still by the absence of frames or glass covering the paintings, which are tacked directly to the wall, a tactic which gives a sense of immediacy.

Also at Krakow this month are charming aerial views of New York, Nevada, Denver and other cities by Yvonne Jacquette, who makes preliminary drawings during airplane flights.