

24

ART

Vivid paintings focus on California sprawl

By Larissa Archer
Special to *The Examiner*

Painter Scott Yeskel's exhibit at Jack Fischer Gallery is titled "Mapping California," but it could as aptly be named "Leaving California" or "Escaping California."

It is not a pervasive view of California he depicts. He ignores the wealthy enclaves of Hollywood and San Francisco, and the climatic diversity of the lush northern half of the state, and focuses entirely on the sunbaked sprawl of the less-affluent inland south.

Volvos from the 1980s and old-fashioned trailers stand at the ready outside what would look like shabby tract houses, but for their apparent loneliness in the landscape.

Yet the scenes look as though they have already been abandoned. Windows are shut with their curtains drawn, and even the tended hedges fail to suggest the human touch. Cars speed down the highway, their windows obscured to render drivers and passengers invisible. Unmanned, apparently unstocked taco trucks idle in parking lots, with a few empty folding chairs sitting unneeded nearby.

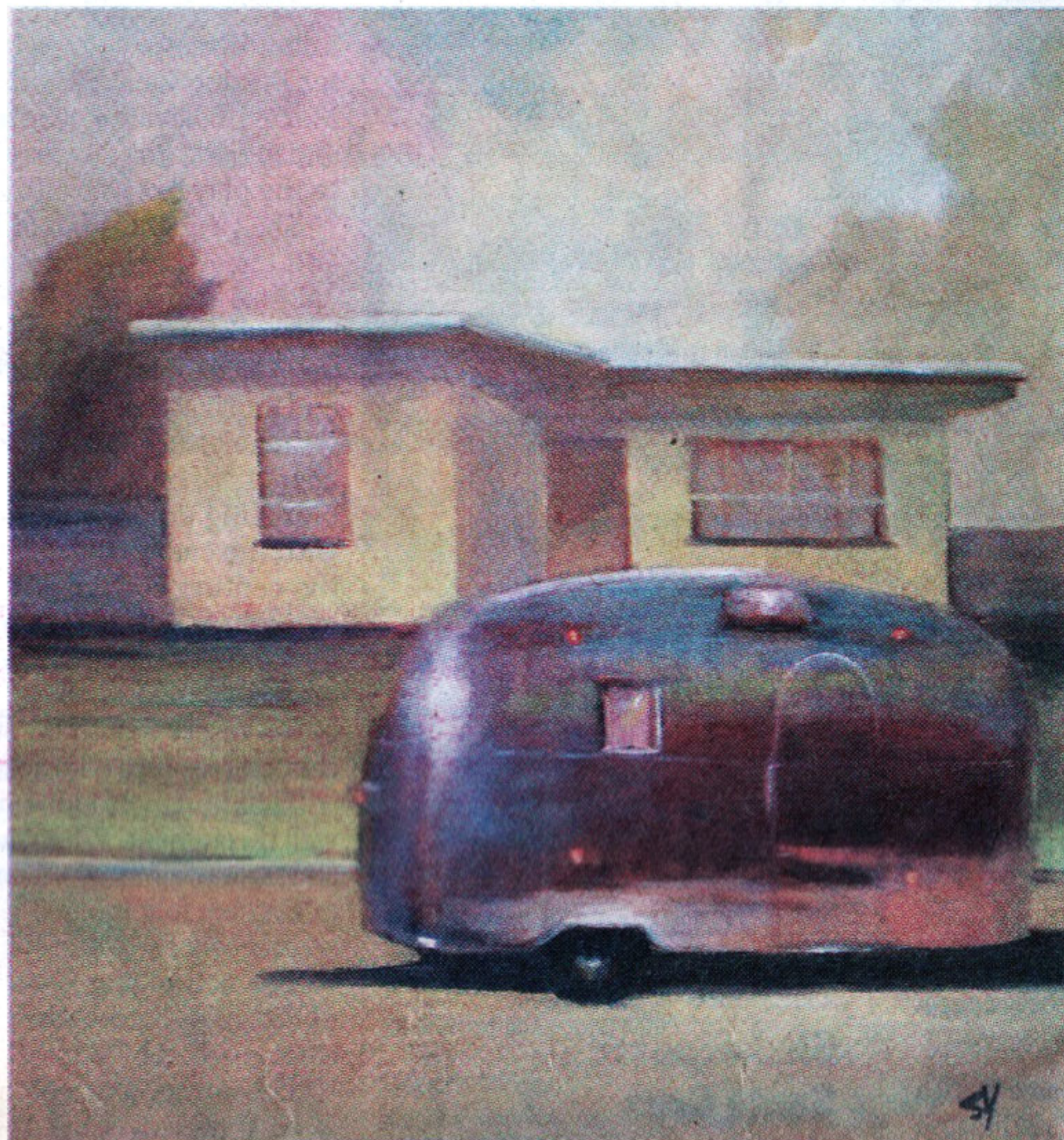
The alienation is as palpable as the

heat rising off the asphalt. Yeskel's California is a place to escape, and the implication is that the exodus is already well under way.

Yet, for all the focus on transportation (every painting except several abstract works include one or more vehicles), what comes across is a sense of atrophy, the dynamism of the Golden State desiccated in the heat and smog, so that even the occasional palm tree seems more a sad token of former promise, a hint of the abundance that never reached these swathes of desert land.

Yeskel paints with a sure, unfinicky hand, and possesses a talent for rendering texture. It almost seems like one would burn one's hand by touching any of his portraits of airstream campers parked in the sun (and the attention he pays them, not only in the number of times he paints them, but in his masterful delineation of the curve and reflectivity of the metal, and the starburst of sun glinting off their shoulders, do seem to elevate these works to the status of portraits).

His abstract depictions of infrastructure are also notable: in lurid orange, sky blue, sand beige and tar black, his canvases are like blurry photos taken from one of his cars as it speeds away from the unforgiving landscape.



IF YOU GO
Mapping California

Where: Jack Fischer Gallery, 49 Geary St., fourth floor, San Francisco
When: 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; closes Aug. 20
Admission: Free
Contact: (415) 956-1178; www.jackfischergallery.com

Lonely landscape: "Their Final Trip" is among the intriguing scenes by painter Scott Yeskel on view in "Mapping California" at Jack Fischer Gallery.