



Pamela Jorden

by Stephen Maine

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Pamela Jorden at Klaus von Nichtssagend

This artist-run Williamsburg gallery inaugurated its program two years ago with a solo show by Pamela Jorden, a young Los Angeles-based adherent of a reemergent gestural abstraction. The five untitled oil-on-linen paintings, all dated 2006, in Jorden's recent return engagement are structured primarily through the accretion of lots of little, local marks, gathering flicks and flourishes of the brush and palette knife in more or less discrete and often unbroken "tube" colors against a brooding, dark ground. The parsimonious paint handling emphasizes tactility, as if the painter were feeling her way across her surfaces. The interaction of hues functions not to establish the illusion of space so much as to suggest a psychological resonance embodying the opposing impulses of "sunshine and noir," to borrow Lars Nittve's phrase describing the L.A. zeitgeist.

The paintings almost coalesce into depiction but resist. In one, 40 inches square, a flurry of fidgety marks in primaries, neutralized secondaries and transparent whites is piled up against the right side, as if blown there by a gust of wind. The massing of brushy swatches in two others seems to have drifted toward the top, and hovers above the shadowy, broadly painted expanses. Copious blacks and near-blacks hold the palette's prettiness in check and, far from vacant, they advance as active, churning, sonorous fields, attended to just as thoughtfully, if not as conspicuously, as the busier areas. A rough trapezoid in matte and glossy blacks takes over the smallest, 13-inch-square painting, where curling stripes in saturated primary hues retreat to the upper right corner. Here Jorden's skittish touch settles into a determined scribble and scrape, and the composition is as anchored as the others are off-kilter.

In command of her vocabulary, Jorden is in the process of formulating a deeply idiosyncratic statement. But her studied contrasts – between high-key and murky passages, thin and fat lines, a fast and a slow touch – can feel contrived. A perky curlicue made with a very small brush provides variety in the scale of mark-making, but seems rote. And she must work through the influence of Amy Sillman. In resolving these issues, the artist has her work cut out for her, but the vitality and focus of this exhibition suggest that she is equal to the task. The largest and most ambitious of the canvases, at 7 by 5 feet, unspools fascinatingly. Out of a jostling cluster of vigorous, Dufyesque squiggles in eager hues sprout five stripes of transparent white, splayed across a tarry ground and shooting off the top edge. The lower half of the painting is dynamite, a ramshackle avalanche of painterly notation, as if the floor of the picture had just dropped out. It is loose and particular at once. The jumble of intention and improvisation feels stumbled upon, not located, and suggests what might happen if Jorden relaxed her grip a little, relinquished a bit of control, let her work steer itself.