

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

ArtSlant
June 2008



Abstraction at Two West Loop Galleries

Unpainted - Recent Abstract Painting

Thomas Robertello Gallery

939 W. Randolph St., Chicago, IL 60607

June 13, 2008 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Two group shows that have recently opened focus on abstract painting by contemporary artists. "Unpainted – Recent Abstract Painting" at Thomas Robertello Gallery in the West Loop and Bianca Beck, Josh Brand, Matt Connors, Zak Prekop, Hayley Tompkins, Sue Tompkins a number of blocks north and west of the West Loop at Shane Campbell Gallery.

"Unpainted" is more declaratively focused on the theme of abstract painting, while the group show at Shane Campbell's is a de facto one. The most captivating work on view at the latter is by Zak Prekop, the painting is a field of near identical off white tones that optically compete with one another, especially in the diffuse natural light that comes through the window. It is in fact a very colorful painting, however, and as your eyes try to see it, the colors changes. The two hues hover somewhere around a grayed out mauve and fluorescent blue. But then you look back and now the mauve is pink, and the dance back and forth continues. The odd play of color and value along with the structure of the composition immediately brought me to early or mid Ad Reinhardt, before the red blue and black monochromes, and before the final last paintings, when bricks of colors, like colors, near cousins of colors and so on, fought with each other.

The other painting at Shane Campbell's that got me thinking about abstraction in general is by Bianca Beck. It is a shabby nearly unpainted picture with some errant marks and two thick muddy rectangles that appear

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to be windows. Apparently they are, it's a kind of reductive studio view. I was annoyed at that, abstracting reality, that's soft abstraction. But how is a painting like the one next to it, also Beck's any different? I would be opposed to the representation, and ironically appropriate that they are windows, in the way Reinhardt famously railed against the notion of a painting being "a window." The one next to it, a mass of thick and thin gobs, has space in the same way, really. Greenberg for all his discussion of optical space was really talking about regular space. The only difference is that in representational painting it is sky and trees and in abstract painting it is a thick brush stroke that is the tree, and it is the ground that acts as the sky, our mind is reading it the same way.

The title of the show at Thomas Robertello gets its name from the work of Callum Innes. His process is described: "Seemingly monochromatic colors are applied and subsequently unpainted with washes of turpentine." It is an interesting idea, the whole concept of painting, and then unpainting. I can't help but think of the way Robert Rauschenberg described his thoughts on Erased de Kooning Drawing. He first thought of erasing his own drawings, but that wouldn't work, he decided because it would be making and then taking away, he had to start with something already done, and just take away. But the work of making then unmaking, is as at least an interesting project. Here, Innes' is creating work that is divided into quadrants, laying out the various stages of thick uniform paint, washed out paint, and dripped down and carried away sediment. The situation is further problematized when this occurs in white on white.



Jim Lee, *Untitled (White with Caution)*, 2008, acrylic on canvas with wood, 48"x32"x6"

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The other group of work in the show that draws attention is by Jim Lee. Definitely of the Richard Tuttle and post minimalist camp, Lee's pieces are as much about the object of painting, as the practice. Built into these painting-objects is not only a shabby humility, but also a quirky humor, this along with a sophisticated language of abstraction. Untitled with Red Stripe seems straight-forward enough, riffing on mid century Modernism perhaps, But around its edges is a superfluous ring of linen, still stapled on in a haphazard way. And the thin dark ark isn't drawn or painted; it is a gap between two pieces of linen that have been meticulously and secretively reattached via thin sutures on the backside. Untitled (White with Caution) references the shaped canvases of Ellsworth Kelly, and the color and material of Blinky Palermo. But it has this rustic quality that makes one wonder, was there not enough canvas and the shoddy stretchers literally bowed? Is this a failed attempt at a graceful sweeping shaped support? Peering around the sides, a fairly intricate and well-crafted lattice is visible. Instead of being a reveal, where you slap your knee and say, "ohhh clever!" You are left in a moment of tension, "this is intentional, but why?" And that is a space you want to be in while looking at art.

-- Erik Wenzel

(Top image: Patrick Berran, Shifty, 2007, oil and acrylic on panel, 24" x 24". Images courtesy of the artist and Thomas Robertello Gallery)

Posted by Erik Wenzel on 6/23

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