

March 2008

ARTSEEN

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The Rest is Silence

Saturday, March 1st, 2008 at 8pm
The Great Hall at Cooper Union
7 East 7th Street at Third Avenue

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Freeze Frame

by Craig Olson

Thrust Projects January 11 - February 24, 2008

Like a homemade blade to the golden throat of the status quo, the eight paintings in *Freeze Frame* are convincing and sharp. For the most part, the eight women who make up this show have chosen not to stray too far from a plainclothes abstraction that can range from the personal and passionate to the hell-for-leather. In other words, there's enough quality stuff here to light a fire in every train yard oil drum from Maine to the Mobile Bay—they mean what they're doing and it shows. As a group-show thankfully lacking some contemptible curatorial theme, it allows for enough pushback among the paintings to keep things interesting, difficult, and open. It's a reminder that art can happen on a local level, where people argue and have something to say, as opposed to some faceless, nameless, global mass of intellectual morality.



Wendy White, "Block from Smack," (2007). Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, metal, foam. 63 x 36 in.

Elizabeth Cooper, a New York-based painter who's been showing consistently for little over a decade, is the show's curator. Her large painting "Untitled (Orange/Yellow)" (2007) looms in the corner of the room like a nasty projectile of noxious saliva spat from the mouth of a hallucinatory komodo dragon. Some sort of image (a shrub or floral still life?) attempts to simmer out in slow motion from beneath the venomous globs and splatters before surrendering to a frantic cacophony that used to be exclusive territory for expressionist anxiety. Closer examination, however, reveals an unexpectedly careful application of materials, something slightly cool and removed. It's painting that isn't afraid to straddle that tenuous line between expression and intellect, purity and corruption.

By contrast, Lisa Hamilton's "Butterknife" (2007) tumbles slowly in a hypnotic, humid sway that's hard to resist. Clean, loose, and rife with contradictions—formally, chromatically, conceptually—the space she creates is both vast and restrained, transparent and opaque, evincing an admiration for the traditional elements of the medium and a longing to grasp its elusiveness.

OFF THE RAIL

Central Branch of
The Brooklyn Public Library
Grand Army Plaza
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Thurs, Feb. 21 7 p.m.
YURIY TARNAWSKY (*Like Blood In Water*) reads some of his recent fiction and translator Anne McLean will read from and discuss her translation of **Julio Cortázar's**, *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute*, that was just published by Archipelago Books.

Thurs, Mar. 13 7 p.m.
WILLIAM GASS will be reading from and reflecting on the 40th anniversary of the publication of his groundbreaking masterpiece *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*.

Thurs, Apr. 10 7 p.m.
SUSAN DAITCH & BEN MARCUS

Thurs, May 8 7 p.m.
CARL WATSON & TERESE SVOBODA

The OFF THE RAIL READING SERIES IS FREE and hosted by Rail fiction editor Donald Breckenridge

inTRANSLATION

New web-only section featuring translated works of short fiction, excerpted longer fiction, and excerpted dramatic writing. In Translation will serve as a venue for outstanding literary translation.

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The bluntly unfettered humor of Jasmine Justice's "Skyline" (2007) is as graceful as a hog on ice. Spatially and visually discombobulating, the picture plane oscillates before our eyes in a mesmerizing rhythm. Whether we are looking up, down, through, or at something, the visual prepositions can leave our head spinning in a giddy swirl. It's a thumbnail sketch of confusion completed by the mind's eye—something like holding your thumb out in front of your face and focusing beyond it into empty space. The result is an idiomatic action, all thumbs and looking, revealing the contradictions of a fixed perspective.

"The Samurai Lesson" (2007) is Joyce Kim's cryptic contribution. The only one here willing to jump entirely off the cliff of abstraction, the artist has collaged fragments of silver plastic onto the surface of her achromatic painting. These clunky additions are arranged to depict generic human forms, resembling those little graphic people who delineate to real people where it's acceptable to shit and walk. The outsized central figure has seemingly been sliced in half by a long, skinny shard of plastic, while a diminutive, fractured headless body hangs in a shallow distance to the left. All around this commotion looms a mass of dense, shifting dark gray—a big dull reminder of our fate. It's a lovely picture of utter desolation that's spooky, goofy, and shimmering.

The baroque dynamics of "Victoria Park" (2007) by Alisa Margolis is perhaps the cleanest mess in the show. Its flat, slick surface is at odds with the tangled mass of twiggy brushstrokes that form the painting's central image. The slithering synergy of this calculated chaos spills around the picture plane like blood into mercury. The old world tropes of spatial illusion and pictorial depth are exploited to great effect, as neither feel studied or contrived, but learnt and known.

Matter-of-factly strange and totemic is Carrie Moyer's "Green Sap" (2007). Two elongated tangles of opening and overlapping lingam-clitoral-globular forms hover within a field of cool gray. Pools of translucent urine yellow, sprinkled with glitter, ooze in and out of these forms. They feel like mutant hybrids of human anatomy and tacky faux-modernist interior decoration—doleful embryos sashaying in awkward patterns. Flatfooted and a little freaky in their disconcerting comfort, they're a keen example of the union of humor and intelligence, and of the conflation of low and high culture, found in much of the painting in this show.

Veronica Tyson-Strait's smart, knotty and small "Untitled" (2007) tugs like a wire around the eyeball. The flat, precise surface recedes pictorially into a deep space overrun by hundreds of thin translucent lines that stretch edge to edge across the surface of the painting. This dense, seemingly illogical web begins to form strange shapes and structures that dissolve and vanish just as quickly as they appear—ghosts of the hysterical geometry at work in this tiny world.

Anchored near the door to the gallery is Wendy White's "Block from Smack" (2007), an edgy punk of a canvas smacked with poisonous pink and burnt-out black. The artist has used a combination of spray and

acrylic paint in an anti-compositional way, rejecting the conservative norms of “good” painting for a fast and slack approach. Nothing feels precious here, or arbitrary; it’s more of a bleary-eyed elation, strung-out and vibrating. It’s the humorous little neon-green foam soccer ball attached to the left edge of the painting that offers the biggest slap. Hit with a blot of black paint, this little orb challenges and invites us to question the validity of its inclusion, all the while remaining unquestionably integral to the soundness of the painting.

It’s no big surprise these eight women have a tenuous relationship with the history of their medium, but none here seem too hung up about it. They’ve all figured a way through that’s layered, insightful, and poignant without being didactic, reactionary, or agreeable. How well the viewer can relate to this bittersweet relationship will decide how deeply these paintings sink in, but to this witness it’s as sound a conceptual framework as any, offering a way of being and doing regardless of the critical and politically pigeonholing establishment surrounding them.

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