

BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen By [D. Dominick Lombardi](#)

Allison Miller: *World*



Allison Miller, *Blood Knot*, 2023. Oil stick, acrylic, coins, and safety pins on canvas, 72 x 70 inches. Courtesy Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC.

The first thing I thought of when I saw a press image from Allison Miller's upcoming exhibition was the art of Francis Picabia. Picabia, known for the way he often gathered together the most tangential, unrelated images and elements and made them sing, was a composer of visual stimuli based on everything from color, texture, shape, or material existence, working open ended and unrestrained, pulling from everywhere and discerning what works best aesthetically. This is the essence of Miller's paintings at Susan Inglett Gallery in Chelsea.

Miller digs deep into the world around her, scattering peripheral elements like the tiny rocks and dirt one kicks up in an abandoned city lot or scanning for misplaced artifacts. Some elements in Miller's paintings reappear, as they sit atop slightly modulating, near-monochromatic fields, spaces that encompass both the innermost and the universal. There are hints at geometry, metallurgy, botany,

flow, and genetics that, with the discerning eye of the artist, form a uniquely complete composition as a compelling, choreographed consciousness.

Blood Knot (all works 2023) has one of those metaphoric holes Miller mentally digs, revealing curiosities amongst the darkness. Here, we see a sifted series of circuitous links that later reenter the foreground, as flattened coins that once were placed on train tracks conjure the mischief of youth; feigned foliage that breathes life; and a sweeping string of safety pins taking center stage as key elements in the elusive narrative. Viewers approaching this painting may first notice the bold black Francis Bacon-like arrow and a slightly glowing red/orange "C" that direct and hold the eye, a process that delineates both documentation and deliberation. It is easy to see how Miller creates and solves puzzles, mental menageries that somehow fit together like the things one spies during a daydream or capture our attention through any of the five senses.

As with *Blood Knot*, the painting *Library* also has arrows, seven to be exact, that curve slightly to the lower left. A major component of the composition, they are counterbalanced by a handful of other symbols. One, an oval that sits atop four teardrop-shaped leaves repeats as a smaller, mirror image on the opposite side of the picture. The immediacy of the symbols and lines, some as thin and fine as a lightly applied color pencil, and the trapezoidal shape of the overall black canvas give *Library* a ritualistic feel, as if those who find the key to its mystery will experience enlightenment, albeit oddly alternative. The lime-green cloud that carries the arrows, and the

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drips that occurred while painting it, show Miller to be an artist who revels in the action of painting, the physics of wet paint, and the question of what is factual.

Jalousie, which at first appears to be the simplest painting in the exhibition, is one of the more complex. At first glance, the snakelike application of a dark flowery fabric, which is teased out with opposing thin black wavy lines that mimic its form, seems to be one of the few elements that inhabit the muddled white field. But then we see two small patches of color and four small, striped, strutting black worms that march away from the action. The complexity comes in with the sporadic borders that emerge as slivers of color and dashes along the edges of the canvas, marks that alternately "frame" this little drama and further activate the suggested movement in the main. It is difficult not to get involved in Miller's work on some level, as her paintings speak in teasing, near-familiar hieroglyphs that give us just enough to catch our attention, just long enough to make a lasting impression.



ALLISON MILLER, *Smoke and Smoke*, 2023. Oil, acrylic, and fabric on canvas, 72 x 70 in. Courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC.

Conversely, *Smoke and Smoke* has the most reductive method of painting: the artist has over-painted the entire brownish ground with white and more carefully painted out large sections of the diagonal black lines. You can see here and there where Miller has casually left some patches of the ground layer for the careful observer. These hints about process, the little details throughout the show that might go unnoticed to the quick observer, are rewards for spending time, as Miller, like any accomplished artist, wants us to ponder, not pass up. The artist is always testing the limits of the concept of composition. Miller uses no preliminary studies or plans and relies solely on knowing what works when the time comes to step away. Her painting is very much about editing and understanding where the eye moves to or rests. And in the end, what new sensitivity we walk away with is a direct result of how much time we spend looking.