

ARTFORUM

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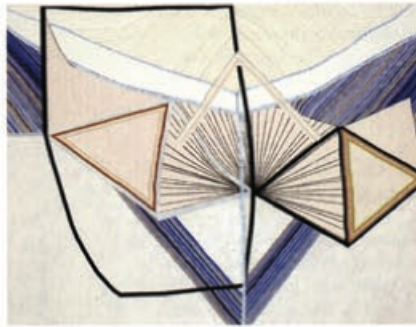
LOS ANGELES

Allison Miller

ACME

As the recent "Société Anonyme" exhibition at UCLA's Hammer Museum helpfully reminded us, painterly pluralism is nothing new. But for all its diversity, avant-garde modernism was largely predicated on imperatives, on overturning old paradigms for something more visionary—whether futurism or Fauvism, Surrealism or geometric abstraction. I must admit I often get a little perplexed about what the imperatives might be for contemporary painting, beyond the laws of supply and demand, and the speculative whims of fashion.

But while I wait for an imperative to emerge, I'm willing to settle for some simple painterly intelligence that requires the viewer to slow down and, well, look. In her solo gallery debut, Allison Miller presented six playful, mildly eccentric abstract paintings on board, each measuring four by five feet or vice versa. Despite their size, these paintings are modest proposals. At first glance, they appear to have a loose, improvisational quality, and the title of *Notebook*, 2006, seems to suggest that some if not all began as doodles. In many ways they still function as drawings, though it's unclear whether Miller has transposed smaller sketches to this larger scale, in the manner of Jonathan Lasker, who seems to be a likely influence here, along with Mary Heilmann, Frank Stella, Philip Guston, and peer Bart Exposito. Whatever the case, Miller's paintings do not seem entirely predetermined, and bear evidence of decisions made and unmade—slowly—in real time.



Allison Miller, *Untitled (V)*, 2006, oil, acrylic, and ink on wood panel, 48 x 60".

Monument, 2005, features a tall, emblematic figure-8 painted in racing stripes of red, pink, salmon, mauve, bright blue, cerulean black, and white, cinched by a white impasto rectangle. This centrally placed, symmetrical figure is disrupted in one location by an abrupt rearrangement of more colored stripes. Behind this figure is a lopsided shape—like a trashed parasol—broken into uneven wedges of sage, tan, gray, black, off-white, pale pink, and maroon. Here and throughout the show, Miller establishes a language derived from a number of carefully controlled tensions or paradoxes: Symmetry abutting asymmetry; acrylic adjoining oil paint; hard-edged abstraction articulated with a slightly wobbly freehand; flatness canceling shallow depths of field; tasteful "designer" shades combined in almost nauseating quantities; and so on. (A less successful tension is Miller's choice to paint on board rather than canvas, providing a slickness that works against the improvised freehand that is part of the work's interest.)

The best of these works achieve complexity without getting overly complicated. *Monument* and *Portrait*, for example, manage to hold their scale, while *Untitled (V)*, 2006—a riotous arrangement of V shapes and triangles set against wavy bands of blue or pale pastels, intersected by cartoonish, looping black lines—almost risks letting the whole thing collapse from an overabundance of competing parts. This "almost" is a crucial threshold, and Miller occupies it confidently, with one foot on either side of the line. Despite the lack of a clear imperative, her slowly unfolding doodles are a quiet revolt against the painting-as-fashion fashion.

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—Michael Ned Holte