

Vetrocq, Marica E., "ALLISON MILLER: Feed Dogs," *The Brooklyn Rail*, 4 April 2018.

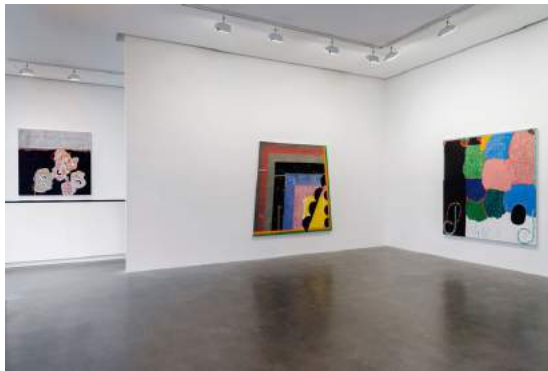
BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ALLISON MILLER: *Feed Dogs*

by Marica E. Vetrocq

SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY | MARCH 15 — APRIL 21, 2018



|Allison Miller, Installation View, 2018. Courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC Photo: Adam Reich, NY|

The six new paintings in Allison Miller's compact exhibition at Susan Inglett make a convincing case for a capacious abstraction that is exacting yet playful, rich in smart art references yet firmly colloquial. Miller works directly on the canvas, but her paintings are far from improvisational, arising instead from a deliberative sequence of appraisals and adjustments, some of which are evidenced by wraithy *pentimenti* or ridges of paint left by the tape she uses to carpenter a contour. Miller's distinctive vocabulary of notational marks and devices includes slender lines sheathed in a protective outer color, strokes that arc and taper like locks of baby hair, and "frames" of paint that extend along two or three edges of the canvases, retaining walls that counter the pressure of so much surface business. Those ready-to-hand features are supplemented by Miller's deft, occasionally improbable interventions: a just-so swipe of glitter, a collaged bit of demure fabric, a deadpan Ellsworth Kelly miniature, or a smear of crimson—startling as a lipstick stain—on a ground the color of pale flesh. Bound together by Miller's evident love of paint itself, the works combine knowing eccentricity with an awkward stateliness.

The show, Miller's fourth at Inglett, includes two from a series of large trapezoid-shaped paintings launched last year. It's a challenging choice for a painter accustomed to letting the rectangle play straight man to her own formal larking, for by itself, a trapezoid can suggest anything from accelerated recession to the monumentality of ancient ceremonial architecture. *Triangle* (all works 2018)

goes the farthest to simultaneously invoke and subvert structural sobriety. At the bottom right, a lemony trapezoidal



Allison Miller, *Trunk*, 2018. Oil, oil stick, acrylic, Flashe, modeling paste, glitter and collage on canvas 73 × 68 in. Courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC Photo: Robert Wedemeyer, LA

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patch glows "forward," only to be intercepted by a procession of black semicircles that helps to form the titular triangle. A receding sequence of larger trapezoids—or do we see the flat bands of a chevron?—points up and over to the canvas's narrow left shoulder. Meanwhile, the lead semicircle steps over the enframing lines of fluorescent orange and green. *Triangle* seems to stretch and shift, like the bellows of an old camera. Where they traverse a band of black, Miller's recurring blunt marks pick up the two fluorescent hues and become as weightless as paper shredder output adrift in deep space. Hints of architecture, spatial flux, circular bounce, blue-bruised mauve and inky black—thoughts of Matisse's *The Moroccans* are irresistible.

Tongue is far and away the more giddily oddball of the two trapezoid paintings. Here, in a central rectangle formed by two lengths of braided cotton trim, stands the garden-grown, hypertrophied organ, mounted by a fat black line that looks riverine or serpentine, as you prefer. Two graphic arrows, straight from the Francis Bacon playbook, indicate the line's upward course and direct attention to a pair of near-semicircles that peek above the rose-pink slab. One is sunny as a yolk, the second black as an eclipse and haloed by a penumbra: the cosmos on the tip of a tongue.

The other paintings on view observe rectangular decorum and more clearly reflect the assurance with which Miller consolidates her compositions and imbues them with strange feeling. *Bury Arch* is divided by an implicit horizon, but there are no supporting indications of depth. The dark lower field becomes a cutaway, revealing a subterranean realm that houses four irregular, burgeoning masses in which Miller's jacketed lines and arcing strokes are suspended like genetic material. We could be witnessing a process of germination—a painting nursery?—sheltered by a moist, stippled sky.



Allison Miller, *Cream*, 2018. Oil, acrylic, glitter and collage on canvas 73 × 87 in. Courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer, LA

Worlds away in affect is *Trunk*, a dramatically colored pantomime of impending but unspecified collapse. Baggy shapes—Gustonesque sad sacks with irritated cheeks—are piled up as if poorly mortared fieldstones, their very substance dissolving into the snowy zone below. One of Miller's long-stemmed curves is entwining with a gaily bordered oval; their alter egos to the right stand apart from one another, a couple unable to connect. Ornamental chunks of dried acrylic, glistening with oil stick and glitter, suggest plant life just below the aqua frame that caps the composition like a rim of sky. These small concessions to cheer only underscore the haplessness below.

For the last decade or so, Miller has been refining a disarming, vernacular abstraction that maximizes the associative propensities of form and color and dramatizes the essential subjectivity of visual experience. Judging by these new paintings, a near-narrative impulse is also animating the work. There's ample humor and rule-breaking still, yet the buzz of insubordination seems to have been tempered by a calm assessment of the expressive contribution of each idiosyncratic maneuver. Compositional ambiguity is not simply an enlivening disruption; it's also grounds for a connection between painter and viewer. Miller seems to be welcoming multiple readings of her work, high and low, down-to-earth and really out there. You suspect that she's already anticipated most of those readings and is curious to learn about the rest.