

Mostert, Carolina. 'Amy Sillman: Landline'. this is tomorrow Online. 19 October 2018

this is tomorrow

Amy Sillman: Landline



Title : Amy Sillman, Dub Stamp, 2018, a multi-part series of double-sided acrylic, ink, and silkscreen works on paper, 152.5 × 101.5 cm each

Credit : Photograph courtesy Damian Griffiths

Amy Sillman: Landline
Camden Arts Centre
28 September 2018 - 6 January 2019
Review by Carolina Mostert

Amongst my favourite couples in art history, I list Figuration and Abstraction. I find their on-off, tumultuous relationship endlessly fascinating. The rise of abstract painting in the 20th century can be, to an extent, read as a reaction to figurative art, when the style began to be perceived as saturated and inadequate by artists internationally – Malevich in Russia, Delaunay in France, Mondrian from the Netherlands and Americans whose dynamism is perhaps best known as Abstract Expressionism. At many points, since then, the interest in the figurative was rekindled; recently and visibly, for instance, in the idiosyncratic portraits by painters such as Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Amy Sillman, apparently, offers the two old lovers a moment of peace. 'Landline', on view at the Camden Arts Centre until January 2019, is not really devoted to Sillman's talent as a figurative painter, but does not do justice to her flair as an abstract artist either. The fact that the show extends throughout all the galleries of the institution functions as a clear statement that the artist has disembarked in the UK – 'Landline' is her first institutional exhibition in the country. This also, however, allows visitors to view the breadth of Sillman's artistic landscape: one where abstraction and figuration coexist, through her multifarious drawings, print works and pieces executed with oil and a variety of media. The diversity of Sillman's solo show appears so harmonious that abstraction and figuration seem no longer opposed within the context of the luminous Camden Arts Centre galleries.

There are instances where such blurred lines are intentionally sought by Sillman. She calls a set of thickly coloured, closely stacked rows 'Untitled (Logs)', thus evoking imagery which is vividly realistic, yet not fully committing to it with her choice of words. She casts her work both as abstract and figurative; or perhaps, envisages the opportunity for it to be considered not in terms of existing, strict categories, but as belonging to a potential, intriguing, else.

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Showing us the other – or, more precisely, another – side of things seems to be a prerogative of Sillman's. She does this, clearly, with 'Dub Stamp', a sequence of 30 works on paper exhibited across a wooden, crackly floored room of the Centre. Both sides of each sheet have been painted, printed, layered with the artist's symbology. The sequence shifts between kneeling anthropomorphic forms that have been stylised in white and black and networks of explosive colour laid onto the whiteness of the background. The methodology with which the pieces are executed – in itself very interesting – is made even more arresting by the way in which they are displayed. They take centre stage by hanging freely in the middle of the room, held up by pegs on a line.

The line, with its many selves and many identities, makes several appearances in Sillman's show. It is a support, in the case of 'Dub Stamp'; and functions as the first act when the very first thing we learn about the exhibition is precisely its name, 'Landline'. Seeing it so bare makes me wonder how easily certain lines are drawn – between opposing and complementary things such as the ones we call figurative as opposed to the abstract – and how easily these lines can also be crossed.

<http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/amy-sillman-landline>