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Art in Review



SIMON PRESTON, NEW YORK; THOMAS DANE, LONDON

“3b”(2009), oil, gesso, acrylic and ink on linen, by Caragh Thuring, who is having her first New York solo show of paintings.

Caragh Thuring

Assembly

Simon Preston
301 Broome Street, near Forsyth
Street
Lower East Side
Through Nov. 1

In her first New York solo show of paintings, Caragh Thuring, a young Brussels-born artist who lives and works in London, conveys a self-conscious ambivalence toward her medium. Her paintings consist, on first sight, of seemingly random shapes and marks scattered across unprimed linen whose light-brown tone forms a conspicuous part of the picture. These elements hover autonomously in a state of peaceful coexistence between abstraction and representation and intention and indifference. They resemble the parts of a sentence that have been diagrammed and patiently await the interested reader who wants to put them back together so they make sense again. Luckily, this isn't too hard to do.

Minimally recognizable fragments of trees and such suggest outdoor settings, and Manet's "Luncheon on the Grass" appears to be a theme.

In one work, two sharp-edged bow-tie shapes and some white lines imply the lounging gentlemen from Manet's painting, while a dark-brown, treelike vertical intimates the wooded grove. A thin red line runs diagonally from a lower to an upper corner with a sense of purpose that is nowhere else apparent. In a second canvas, a white seated figure implies the female nude usually depicted with Manet's gentlemen. In a third, a spindly ladder

stands among spindly trees near what might be someone in a hammock and two additional figures toppled over on the ground, the grass or possibly a picnic blanket. And in a fourth, a fallen figure and a dropped cane appear to be flanked by puddlelike areas of gray-blue. Surprisingly, both Francis Bacon and Florine Stettheimer come to mind in front of these works, along with early Neil Jenney. Their scattered marks and lack of reworking make them direct and mysterious. Titling the show "Assembly" is also intriguing. It evokes the phrase "some assembly required," a notion that Ms. Thuring might consider.

ROBERTA SMITH