

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Chris Bergeron, "At the ICA: Amy Sillman explores curious parables", *Wicked Local*, October 11, 2013

BOSTON —

As if making art with a claw hammer, Amy Sillman gleefully smashes the boundaries between drawing and painting, cartooning and high art.

Utterly without pretension, she fuses improbable genres to create distinctive images that could be done by no one else but her.

And just as unlikely, Sillman is the earthiest, funniest artist likely to earn approving accolades from the art critics and the everyday Joe and Joan Schmoes.

In her first museum survey, the New York-based artist is exhibiting nearly 100 varied works in "Amy Sillman: one lump or two," a fun and exciting show at the Institute of Contemporary Art that should remind viewers cutting edge art can be, at once, provocative, beautiful, occasionally weird and accessible.

Organized by the ICA's chief curator, Helen Molesworth, "one lump or two" features a mix of work from 1988 to 2013, including drawings, ink and gouache on paper, cartoons, oil paintings, videos and animation made with a cell phone.

Through a wide spectrum of work, this engaging show follows 25 years of Sillman's career from her early use of cartoon-like figure in a vivid palette through her exploration of Abstract Expressionism to her present embrace, according to Molesworth, of "almost equal parts drawing and painting."

Molesworth described Sillman as "one of (the) most influential, contemporary practitioners" of contemporary painting.

She said the show will "introduce audiences to Sillman's exceptional body of work and demonstrate that the basic building blocks of 20th century painting are of continued interest to artists today: color, line, medium-specificity, abstraction and the possibility of communicating in an exclusively visual manner."

Viewers will see strange, vivid paintings like "Unearth" that seem to be visual fables of prosperity and dispossession. There's haunting drawings, such as "The Other One," the depict the timeless antagonisms that divide humans. And there are observant portraits of couples and biting cartoons that skewer art phonies with lacerating wit.

While Sillman's paintings reveal their own kind of beauty with vivid colors and images that hint at curious parables, Molesworth said she is also interested in "exploring the ugly and grotesque."

Molesworth said Sillman has the artistic courage to "make pictures that get at the messier, uglier side of human existence."

And there are videos and animated drawings made on a cell phone that reveal Sillman's creative process in a brief, intense glimpses.

ICA Director Jill Medvedow said the large, ambitious show uses Sillman's evolving works over a 20-year period to assemble "a narrative and journey" of a prolific and influential artist.

"Sillman is central to the resurgence of the artistic, public and critical interest in painting and abstraction today," she said last week. "This exhibition is a long-awaited opportunity for a close encounter with the emotion, awkwardness, energy and sheer beauty of Amy Sillman's art."

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Appearing near the end of the opening day tour, Sillman said she paints on canvases that have been hung on a wall and spread across the floor, a process she described as "almost physical."

"I work on them without knowing which way they'll finally turn out," she said.

Sillman said some paintings, like "Fatso" from 2009, explore painful subjects and "maybe expose a certain element of pain and anxiety."

Asked to explain how she goes about painting, Sillman paused and said one aspect of her creative personality likes to exercise control of all she does yet she added her "artistic" side has grown increasingly comfortable "with the process of not knowing." "I'm not a scholar," she said, laughing. "I'm an artist. I work in the realm of not knowing."