

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Amy Sillman

Maika Pollack, 'Amy Sillman: Art Meets Intimacy at Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College', *Gallerist*, 20 August, 2014



Installation view from Amy Sillman: 'one lump or two.' *Shade* (2010), *Purple/Pipesmoker* (2009). (Courtesy Chris Kendall Photo)

A show of 25 years of Amy Sillman's work on view at the Hessel Museum, Bard, begins with an uncharacteristically small painting. Most of Ms. Sillman's painting is abstract and moderately vast, but *Lemon Yellow Painting* (2001) is a tiny, luminously colorful take on two coupled bodies. In its abstracted forms you can make out the flash of a tit, a mouth, an ass, a supine spine: it's painting as a meditation on flesh, half-obscured (lesbian?) sex, and closeness, a fitting kick-off to a show that makes the case that there's really no separating abstraction from figuration, or art from intimacy.

The Detroit-born Ms. Sillman is a ubiquitous presence in New York. If you are in Brooklyn (where she has a studio) or around Bard (where she teaches), your paths have probably crossed. Her painting colors are the stuff of Katy Perry videos and cupcake frosting: bright pinks, reds and greens. It's good painting, too, glop-topped with layers of classical underpainting: blues pinning yellows, purples supporting grays and scribbles and gestures layered under fields of saturated colors. The work picks up passages dropped by Philip Guston, Willem de Kooning and even Henri Matisse.

Absurd angles and gloppy lines are her specialty. In *Shade*, 2010, a white arm reaches across an orange field to proffer a small, green orb. The arm is shadowed by a lime-green rectangle, while the orb is silhouetted against a sky-blue shape. Nothing is a right angle. As much scribbled gesture is lurking under as above the orange background. The show's curator, Helen Molesworth, calls it "neurotic abstraction."

While Ms. Sillman's gestures often refer to American Ab Ex art, she interrogates painting's purity by also making cartoons, videos and zines, which are on view in relation to the work. Her black and white cartoons on view, like *A Phrase Guide to the Spring Art Season*, 2006, and *Seating Chart*, 2006 ("mood disorder" is across from "unchecked bouts of mania") are reminders of all the people you don't like in the art world, and evoke the fear that you might be one of them yourself. Ms. Sillman is playing both sides—her art is abstract pure painting, but also linear, funny and knowing. Lots of people have

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walked this line, most notably Ad Reinhardt. In a sense the project hangs on just how good the paintings are, but it also implies that they aren't, alone, enough. She's right on both counts.

The physical world, where painting meets flesh—as in *Lemon Yellow Painting*—is where it all comes together for Ms. Sillman. Art as a way to map or track sociability is the recurring theme of Ms. Sillman's work, from her *Williamsburg Portraits*, 1991-92, to *Portraits from Orchard* (the experimental gallery space) and, starting in 2006, an ongoing series of pictures of couples. You know these people: M & B run a magazine, T & L teach at Bard. The pictures underpin the conviction that art creates, and reveals intimacies. There's a lot of talk today about network painting, and about transitivity, and Ms. Sillman's work certainly fits into this dialogue. This show reveals her, along with Jutta Koether and Nicole Eisenman, to be an adept of the genre; Ms. Sillman's take is gently gossipy, deeply neurotic and surprisingly libidinal.

A few early paintings are here, like the decorative *William Morris #1* of 1988—these seem fussy. Her relationship with art history isn't as lively as her relationship with her social and cultural present. Ms. Sillman's colorful animated iPhone videos, sprinkled throughout the show, are entertaining collaborations with poets, although less interesting than the paintings and cartoons. Still, *13 Possible Futures for a Painting*, a video and a room of over 50 abstract Sillman works, which were stills for the animation, shows painting changing over time, addressing questions about process: when is work done, and what happens along the way. A number of gouaches give this perspective as well.

Being a serious painter and yet having a sense of humor and generosity about your own work and its context is a hard gesture to land. In “one lump or two” Ms. Sillman nails it nearly every time.

<http://galleristny.com/2014/08/amy-sillman-art-meets-intimacy-at-hessel-museum-of-art-bard-college/>