Patricia Treib

Art in America | Jeff Frederick | January 26, 2014



Patricia Treib, Devices, 2013, oil on canvas, 66 × 50 inches; at Wallspace.

In a high-wire act featuring a breathtaking economy of means, Patricia Treib triumphed at Wallspace with an exhibition of eight paintings and four works on paper. While she had a fine smaller show last year at Tibor de Nagy gallery, Wallspace presented what is perhaps Treib's strongest work yet. Her paintings in oil on canvas (most from 2013), all slightly larger than 5 by 4 feet, tend to feature five to seven large shapes in different colors on a painted cream or white ground. The shapes are inflected by the wide, direct brushstrokes with which they are built, in a limited number of moves. While Joan Mitchell hides the beginnings and ends of her strokes, Treib clarifies where each mark starts and finishes. Treib's shapes constitute a personal language throughout the works. Certain arrangements repeat in multiple paintings, such as Camera (II), Device and Devices, which contain forms based on the shape of a 35mm camera. The iconic abstract shapes push and pull against each other, performing a bit like acrobats, and areas of paint seem to become tangible, manipulable objects. A space is created that is two-dimensional but expansive. Air seems to flow in through the white areas, causing the shapes to breathe within a shallow matrix. The translucency of the paint reveals a light background in between the thick brushstrokes. The forms suggest butterflies, mountains or pieces of clothing. Indeed, clothing seems to be a reference point for Treib, as she gives some of her works titles like Cuff or Blouse. In two of the works on paper, The Mobile Sleeve (Gray) and The Mobile Sleeve (Green), soft pastel is applied to a shaped piece of paper that is then collaged onto another sheet, suggesting the kind of

paper pattern that is used for making clothes. The shape is sleevelike, but it also suggests both a gondola oarlock and a Brancusi-esque sculpture. Treib's syntax of repeating forms can itself be seen as relating to the pieces of a garment under construction. Treib's hues are muted, not strident, with pleasing harmonies, like the colors one might find in baked goods. Ocher, browns and various blues-cerulean, slate and royal-appear frequently, along with black. Ridges left by the brush are like lines in frosting applied with a pastry bag, or like the ruching on a garment. The paintings feel fresh, uncluttered, unhurried-the products of a serene mind, or one that aspires to be. There is just enough there to make the paintings feel very satisfying, with an exquisite touch to the brushstrokes. Evident influences include Picasso and Matisse, whose drawing styles Treib evokes in the facility and precision of her marks, as well as Georgia O'Keeffe, who analyzed and abstracted natural forms. Blouse and Guise, which share a structure, seem almost to be creative reconfigurations of Matisse's The Dream (1940), one of the "Romanian Blouse" paintings. The Glass Clock (2012) is surprising in its inclusion of a large area of lemon yellow in the left background that is balanced against watery blue and ocher. It suggests a view through the case of a clock into its workings, which resemble floral and leaflike forms partially glimpsed among reflections.

Original article: Art in America — Patricia Treib