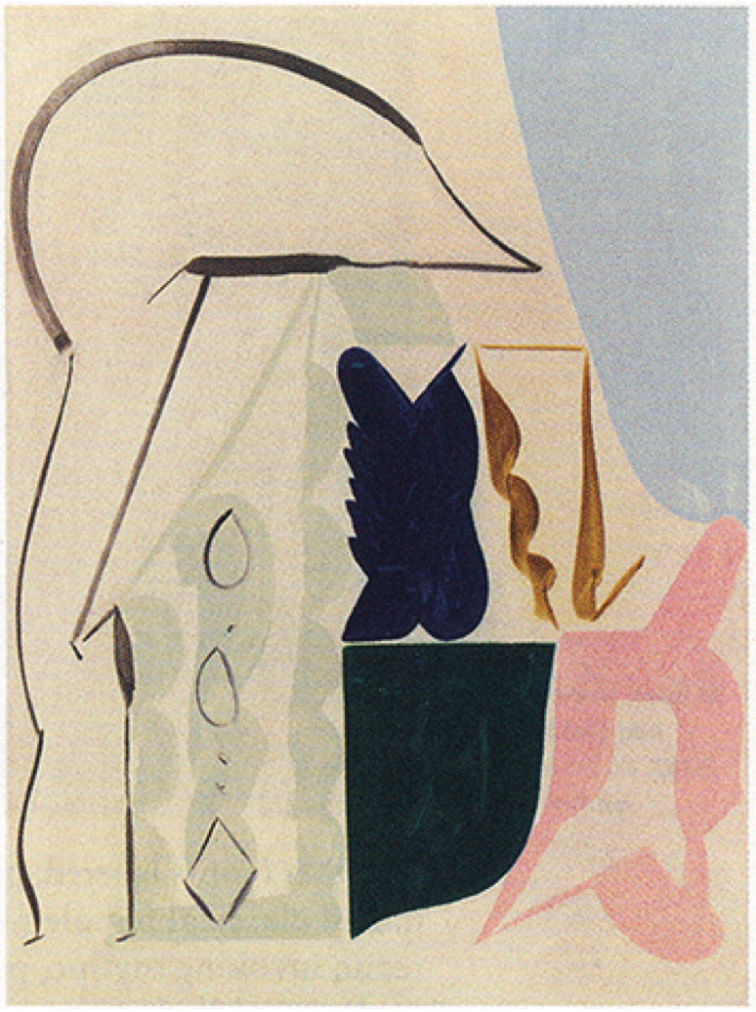
Patricia Treib

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Patricia Treib, Accoutrements, 2013, oil on canvas, 66 × 50 in.

The open, airy abstractions in Patricia Treib's recent exhibition at Wallspace —her first at this gallery—are marked by patches of color and a delicate, decorative line. Executed with a wide brush, the strokes are playful and improvisatory, appearing at times as patterned squiggles, zigzags, or loops, and sometimes resolutely defining a shape. Yet the abstractness of the compositions is undermined by vague intimations of representation—the suggestion of a head, or of a domestic interior. The peculiar indeterminacy of these images results from the fact that the works derive explicitly from an inquiry into sight.

Visual perception, as we know, is unstable: If you look at something long enough, its appearance begins to shift. Treib's paintings register this time of looking, recording the effects of the instability and inconsistencies of vision as the eye is distracted and starts to focus in different ways. The purely abstract Accoutrements (all works 2013), for instance, is based on an old- master painting of two human figures, yet Treib has copied not the actual figures but the negative space between them, an absence that, in Treib's hands, becomes a presence. Rendered in a yellowish brown and set amid planes of light pink, teal, and blue, the central, vertically oriented form—a quirky shape sporting a triangular protuberance—is very much a figure hovering over a ground.

At the same time, Treib's works also capture a longer duration. As she seeks to bring "ephemeral and distant space forward," she also strives to "turn it into an icon," and so she returns, sometimes repeatedly over the course of several years, to the same composition or set of motifs. Each iteration, then, alludes not only to the original act of seeing and painting but to the fact of these repetitions over time. In this show, the quirky, columnar shape of Accoutrements also appears in collage, and Treib has been inserting this form into her paintings since 2011. Likewise, the composition of Device, created while looking at a camera but resembling a Cubist depiction of a head, recurs here three other times: in another painting also named Device and in Camera II. Meanwhile, The Glass Clock, a fragmented composition vaguely reminiscent of wallpaper seen through a scrim, is reproduced in a small pastel with elements of collage. Treib typically executes her paintings relatively quickly, in one sitting, and the various iterations diverge: The combinations of color are different, and their various features are alternately expanded or compressed. Indeed, the canvases seem to revel in the irregularities that follow from the inherently physical and imprecise act of painting by hand.

Across these repetitions, the referent grows distant, yet the thread is never cut. Even at their most abstract, these are always paintings of something. Behind these canvases, there is an artist occupying real time and space and looking: The paintings represent embodied sight.

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