The Same but Different: Patricia Treib's Paintings Empower the Spaces in Between

ARTnews | Ella Coon | August 15, 2017

Interstice, n. an intervening space, especially a very small one

At the entrance to "Interstices," Patricia Treib's recent exhibition at the Lower East Side gallery Bureau, viewers were first confronted with a solitary painting. Titled Enfold (all works 2017), it depicts icy planes of mint and gray interrupted by a curving wedge of cobalt. The shapes, calling to mind everything from the botanical to the calligraphic, resembled puzzle pieces.

Treib's engagement with ciphers and symbols coupled with her treatment of the canvas as uncharted territory—something to be delicately partitioned or meted out—suggests she is interested in something more than abstracting reality—that is, reducing observable objects and scenes to aestheticized contours, colors, or forms. Rather, there is a logic to Treib's work. Her project appeared just as grammatical as visual.



Patricia Treib, *Enfold*, 2017, oil on canvas, 66 × 50 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York.

The main gallery, featuring six paintings spaced uniformly around the perimeter, confirmed this impression. The viewer—pushed to the center of the room by the exhibition's radial layout—would have found the works not as distinct as they'd initially imagined them to be. Not only did all of the

paintings have a similar pastel palette, but the shapes as well as the compositions also seemed to have been recycled. Skirt, a painting with sunny script-like markings, has the same anatomy as Enfold. And Gathers, Blue Proximity, and Asturian also proved analogous in form.

These symmetries however eschew obviousness. For example, in Gathers, Treib substituted Asturian's turquoise for an underpainting in Naples yellow. And in Blue Proximity, a sienna dot at the center of the picture plane (rendered in napthol red in Gathers) became a viridian-hued leaf extending from a looping stem. These color substitutions and slight alterations in form confuse positive and negative space, camouflaging the analogues. In addition, the near-doppelgängers were not displayed side-by-side, further hindering direct comparison.

That said, not all of the works obeyed these formal structures. Two paintings—Pendulum and La Roda—differed. The former, hanging alone on a wall, depicts a flattened candle shape butting up against what looked like a grandfather clock. And La Roda, with its willowy calligraphic markings and contours, felt more floral and linear than the other pieces. Treib is known for extracting forms and colors from memory. So, speculating that these compositions emerged from past experience isn't farfetched. However, when displayed amid such methodic counterparts, such a reading could seem somewhat facile.



Patricia Treib, *Gathers*, 2017, oil on canvas, 72 × 54 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York.

Maybe this is what Treib means by her title "Interstices"? The inability to maintain a system without subtle interruptions and reinventions. What are the intervening spaces, especially the very small

ones?

But Treib's title could have also referred to spatial "interventions" beyond these repetitions and ruptures, such as the latticework between the shapes (the negative space, which, following basic color theory, elicits an optical hum), or the shapes themselves, crammed between unforgiving stretcher bars.

In the end, what became clear was that "Interstices" wasn't so much about shutting viewers out as inviting them in, urging them to commune with her on the subtle interventions made possible only through close inspection.