

VIS-À-VIS/EMILY BERGER AND CLAIRE SEIDL

Kathleen Whitney - 2014
Painting Center Show

The studio visit is both a convention and a tribal rite in the art world; it gives access to an authenticity and rawness lacking in an exhibition. The studio is the site of the conditions and components of making - intention, transition, potential. The visitor enters in the lull between start and conclusion, venturing into the territory of critique and analysis.

This exhibition is a consequence of 30 years of studio visits between Claire Seidl and Emily Berger. During this time, Berger and Seidl have seen each other's work in various states: liminal, tentative, transitional and completed. They share a vocabulary; accept one another's differences; the visits facilitate and influence their work. Although both are abstractionists and differences in outcome are pronounced, they complement rather than oppose one another. In this exhibition, each work yields something that creates a larger whole.

Both painters have created a body of work that is conceptually and formally rich. Both maximize all types of ambiguity - spatial, structural and inferential. They consistently reconsider and revise as they work; the changes are at the heart of their respective processes.

Seidl is constantly responsive to what's on the canvas before her. Her work reiterates her process, claiming every touch and gesture. For her, painting involves an on-going experimentation with the medium and its possibilities. As her work is so process-driven, it's in constant flux up to the moment it finds resolution.

Each painting is the consequence of the fluidity and mutability of paint, color relationships and action within a given territory. She cultivates an allusive image, one constructed from a complex, nuanced and layered space.

Berger's work represents the interplay of additive and subtractive processes with layers of paint that are applied in thin or condensed strips. Her use of pattern and repetition creates a subtle, reductive mix of organic and gestural elements. Comprised of dense and saturated paint, her wavering, sensual, horizontal bands are shadowed by changes and readjustments. Her work is loosely improvisational, seemingly caught in a transitional state; just after or before coming into being. The drama of her work lies in the spaces between bands; these are charged with an electrified presence that expands her language of light and imprecise geometry.

The vast potential of abstraction, its panoply of intention and outcome, is on display in this exhibition. Seidl and Berger's work is freighted with psychological and philosophical associations as well as the immense possibilities of light, color and scale. Neither makes decorative work; their paintings are tough-minded and muscular. Berger's expanding and contracting bars of color and Seidl's agitated or meditative fields present an expansive architecture of form and concept. Their work is the record of a commitment to the physicality of paint and its transformative promise.

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