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## Allison Miller at ACME.

*And I must borrow every changing shape /  
To find expression.*

—T.S. Eliot, *Portrait of a Lady*, 1917

**W**e are bombarded with information. Especially, but not exclusively, by the media that pounds news, like a cook beating a tough steak with a mallet, into a visual/sound bite. News writers hope to get as much sensational hype into as small a package as possible, so it comes at us in multiples that are each, fast, brief and flat. A bite is meant to be superficial. They are not intended to

Allison Miller, *Monument* 2005, oil, acrylic on wood panel, 60" x 48", at ACME, Los Angeles. (Photo: Robert Widemeyer.)



inform, rather to entice. Though they are often frantic in tone, there is no conceptual depth. The hysteria generated seldom represents the gist, or the real implications, of the story. More often than not, the information we receive is a come-on. This is not uncommon knowledge. It has become second nature for most of us: to dig deeper, explore a variety of sources, and to wait for the news beyond the initial bulletin to unfold before forming opinions about the significance (or lack of it) of a report.

Allison Miller's paintings give a preliminary impression similar to a visual/sound bite. There is a sense, upon first glance, that these are intended to be rigid and superficial productions; painting as (non-representational and unemotional) object. After all, they are comprised of geometric forms, include radiating lines, plus flats or stripes of color. In fact, the impulse the paintings initially suggest could hearken back to Barnett Newman, but especially to Frank Stella's geometric works of the 1960s—replete with their direct influence on the development of minimalism—at a time he is credited with saying a painting is "a flat surface with paint on it—nothing more."

Miller, however, has gauged her audience, or more accurately, engaged her audience in a telling moment of cultural recognition. She understands that few among us take our information at face value. And this, the second take or close reading, is where the paintings become consequential or (for those of use who like art to act as intermediary) useful. These works serve as red flags—riptide or undertow warnings posted on the beach of visual information. They are cogent reminders to watch, read and listen carefully for the subtleties or undertones—the subtext often lurking in private and published presentations of information.

Taken in the light of the "emperor's new clothes syndrome," Miller's paintings are an incisive critique of the information age. For example the painting, *Untitled (1)* seems to present as the foreground figure a thickly outlined, in black, rectangle. Upon closer inspection, it becomes obvious that the strength of this figure is compromised in a number of ways. The black line is bowed. It is not an imperial geometric form, rather it has fragile (or sublime) organic characteristics. In addition, soft blue, peach, beige and gray lines cut over, overriding and diffusing the dominance of the focal shape. The radiating lines do not occur equidistantly from one another, they splay with fleshy indifference to their counterparts. And, perhaps most telling, the stripes of blue, gray, brown and tan that activate the background of the painting, wobble. The strips of paint are neither parallel nor equidistant to/from the neighboring strip of color—all are weak, flawed, vain attempts at representing a solid and regular form. *Monument* features a triangulated form outlined by wobbling colorful