

Butler, Sharon, "Allison Miller's dirty paintings and clumsy relationships", TWO COATS OF PAINT, 22 September 2013.

SHARON BUTLER
TWO COATS OF PAINT

September 22, 2013

Allison Miller's dirty paintings and clumsy relationships

Sharon Butler



Image above: Allison Miller, Untitled, 2013, oil, acrylic dirt and pencil/ canvas, 66 x 60 inches.
Images courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery)

Allison Miller's paintings strike me as calculatedly--therefore artfully--imbecilic. In her second solo show at Susan Inglett, the Los Angeles artist forces viewers to ask ridiculously simple questions, such as "What is this?" and "What kind of space am I looking at?" Shapes and lines lock in bad relationships, color squeezes into (and out of) unexpected situations, and ambiguous titles broadcast multiple meanings. In other words, these clumsy, uncomfortable, unresolved paintings are mysteriously unforgettable. They got under my skin.



Allison Miller, Tropic, 2013, oil, acrylic and pencil/canvas, 60 x 48 inches.

Last year in an interview with Tracey Harnish in the Huffington Post Miller tried to articulate her fundamental beliefs about painting and how she approaches the canvas. I think I'm a pragmatic person trying to carve out a grey area that is just as concrete as daily life (however concrete that is) and can be seen, proven, by the paintings I make. The way I've figured to go about doing this through objects is to always try to surprise myself, decision by decision, as I build each painting with the hope that the viewing experience mimics this process, meaning that I hope that the painting unfolds, collapses, comes back together and unfolds again in a different way as the viewer navigates through it. I like making objects that seem

to fail to achieve one goal and inadvertently succeed in achieving another, unanticipated goal.

I use the term "build" when I talk and think about making the paintings because that's the best way of describing how it feels to make them. Things are tacked-on, pushed back, covered-up and layered as if I were building an object. I picture some elements sitting in real space where gravity and physical properties come to bear on them or, conversely, where those properties are defied. This is true to the point that I consider a lot of the paintings to be portraits of sculptures, since, if they were to sit in real space, I don't know what else they would be.



Allison Miller, Mine, 2013, oil, acrylic and dirt/canvas, 28 x 30 inches.

Inspired by Braque's late paintings, Miller covers some areas with dirt. She explains: I was struck by the absurdity that the addition of dirt mixed into the paint lent to late Braque paintings. My use of dirt is more selective but still absurd, in my mind, usually pushing the tangibility and weight of a certain area or form within a painting, or mimicking concrete or rock. This is a ham-fisted and direct way of achieving a kind of realness within a painting which sits in contrast to a line or form made of, say pencil, which is so self-consciously affect-less that it can ground a painting in its materiality -- sometimes counter-acting what the dirt has done.



Allison Miller, Wave, 2013, oil and acrylic/canvas, 36 x 36 inches.



Allison Miller, Lean, 2013, oil, acrylic, and dirt/canvas, 60 x 48 inches.

Individually, Miller's paintings indulge the popular notion that "ham-fisted" composition is compelling content and exploit self-conscious incoherence; collectively, they reveal a steadfast commitment to shifting narrative and serendipitous discovery. As Miller moves forward, I wonder if this will continue to be enough.

"Allison Miller," Susan Inglett Gallery, Chelsea, New York, NY. Through October 19, 2013.