

ARTFORUM

October 2012

Jane Fox Hipple DODGEgallery

The title of Jane Fox Hipple's exhibition "The Way of Things" suggests a rather matter-of-fact approach to artmaking, one rooted in the every-day and concerned more with direct observation—even with a kind of logic—than with flights of imaginative fancy. Yet while Hipple certainly makes use of quotidian materials and sticks to a modest scale, she attempts to unite her object-paintings via an interlinking structure derived in part from narrative fiction. Her works are outwardly abstract and seem independent of one another, but titles such as *Narrator*, 2011, and *Supporting Role*, 2012, suggest that these might not be mere passersby, but rather players in an ongoing drama. There's a connected-ness in their arrangement too, almost as if each individual work were a grammatical component of a sentence.

Hipple describes her project as "a visual display of my argument about whether to find meaning in the hard space of the physical and psychological time, or in an internal realm that is less comfortable to navigate and difficult for me to address verbally." And it's true that these small works seem to alternate between a direct, formal mode of address centered on material and chromatic relationships and a more elusive, private language that may or may not be "readable" to anyone bar the artist. But even if "The Way of Things" did not spell out a coherent argument per se, the pleasingness of the exhibition lay in any case less in the overall text, and more in the details and dynamics of each composition.

The "sentence" spelled out on the show's opening wall actually began with what looked like a letterform, the squat, bold capital L of *Sweep*, 2012. An offcut of gypsum-coated wood onto which dark-painted paper has been not glued but screwed, it led to the more delicate *Patsy*, 2012, in which a gestural design on translucent cotton is interrupted by a Q-tip poking through the fabric. This kind of cheeky physical disruption is Hipple's stock-in-trade; most of the works here feature some sort of break in their surfaces. Some of these are more immediately apparent than others, but all function to prevent us from seeing these paintings as "mere" images—all are objects, and decidedly irregular objects to boot.

Patsy here led on to *Blue Blank*, 2011, in which a dense field of purple and blue all but covers a diminutive panel, leaving only a narrow passage of lighter, mottled color around its edge. Then there's *Pink Thing*, 2011, a painted wood frame filled with a fleshy-looking rectangle of tinted plaster, the center of which has been patched up, Band-Aid-like, with a casually applied rectangle of matching tape. By continually throwing such wry hitches and glitches into the mix, Hipple reminds us of the unreliable, mutable, and vulnerable nature of all creative decision making—and all ways of seeing. If these works are characters, they take the stage warts-and-all, and whether we then identify with them perhaps depends on how closely they seem to chime with our own life experiences. A closing grid of smaller works on paper plays with the same vocabulary, but its rigid arrangement, uni-form framing, and thumbnail format seem antithetical to Hipple's style; she is an artist who even when restricting her ingredients to the least prepossessing likes to give them space to mingle.

—Michael Wilson



Image: Jane Fox Hipple, *Pink Thing* 2011, spray paint on wood, plaster and tape, 10 x 7 x 1.75 inches