



Gallery 19

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Three of a Kind

**Dani Marti
Juilee Pryor
Wart**

Thurs August 19 until Sun August 29
Opening Wed August 18, 6pm

Three of a Kind.

Three artists come together, marking their collaboration with the simple title "Three of a Kind". There is no theme, nor any curatorial overcoding; in short, no critical guidelines to prompt the viewer's response. What a relief. In these times of curatorial mediation it is rare to find a show left to speak for itself, to stand unaided. Three artists, all unlike in style and medium - a photographer, a painter and a sculptor - challenge the viewer to find the connecting thread of their difference.

Dani Marti's monumental floor and wall sculptures invoke the clean lines of high minimalist aesthetics in the surprising new medium of woven plastics. The result is sensuous and tender; less hardened forms than molten flows guided by the energies of the human hand. You're reminded of a Pollack action painting taken into the three dimensions; the disciplined freedom of a Dubuffet line; the fondness for the materiality of matter in a Tapiés. This is high praise for work which more than pays its dues to its minimalist predecessors without any charge of copying, or of ironic post-modern appropriation. The newness of the medium and its particular material qualities speak for themselves. This is minimalism reinvented in a pop material which belongs uniquely to the 90's. It's not retro pop, or even retro futurist pop, trading on the moulded forms of the 70's and 80's.

Marti is careful to choose only new, factory fresh materials. He likes plastic for its purity and cleanliness, and the formal qualities of its extruded lines, often commissioning alterations of a product to suit his specifications. His affinity for the material is profound, based on a spirituality which his minimalist predecessors also sought in their materials: one is reminded of Rothko's chapel pieces. But, whereas Rothko painted nuances of absence in shades of black, retreating from representation to attain the purified emptiness of the monochrome square, Marti weaves out of the void - nothing, empty space. Instead of commencing with the frame of stretched canvas, a determined area to be filled or left unfilled, Marti begins with the simplest act of creation, a weaving together of strands, in deference to the humble weavers who produced much sacred art. (Elizabeth Djutarra's woven conical mats from the recent Biennale are fine examples of this tradition).

His spiritual affinities lie with Buddhism and simple acts of making, or, with the Shakers, who elevated the crafting of the objects of their daily lives to a devotional act. The artist is merely the means of the making of the work. There is no representation, only a feeling for the act of making, and an inner form which arises out of matter as it takes its own shape. Weaving is meditative art, in which the quietness of making combines with care, slowly building up the substance of matter through repetition.

This dedication to task suffuses the work, lending a perceptible subtlety and understatement to the strong lines of a minimalist aesthetic. The works sit well, commanding presence, without being dominating. Each woven line carries the mark of its difference, lending passion, as grace notes in a major form.

Juilee Pryor's bleached out panorama of South Sydney Park is shot in infrared. Her handling of the medium is a far cry from its usual x-ray tricks of white for black reversal, or the classical use of strong blacks and whites in the landscapes of Ansel Adams. With Pryor the leaching quality of the light gently erodes the depth of field - foreground water is flattened into a patch of blackness. Perspective yields to shades of emotional tone. Pryor retains the feel of left-over lands, the waste of in-between spaces, remainders from the site's industrial past. The chimneys of the brick kilns act as locators in a familiar landscape while the luminous ground betrays an emotional shift, taking on the appearance of the sandy, tufted foreign soils crucial to the atmosphere of the terrain vagues of Italian neo-realist cinema. This slight shift in tone takes the local into the realms of the unfamiliar, tapping into the mythos of our collective cinema memories. The image conjures the spectral scenes of post-war Italy, landscapes which steal the life out of their characters, reducing them to drift. In Pryor's panorama you sense the people who crossed lightly, leaving little mark. The light, however, is still warm.

This results in a complex emotional tone which retains the present even in apparent nostalgia. Certainly, the light is strange, partly obliterating the depth of field. But when you begin to look, seeking detail, it hits you. The buildings are new. If you know the area you recognize the new high-rise apartments across the grass, on the other side of the dividing road, built for the recently-arrived middle-class. The way that Pryor has framed the shot, looking out over the low designer hills of landfill, the older and stronger atmosphere of the park has seeped across the line of the road erasing the sharp edges of newness.

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This isn't a picture of a park, a snap, a picture taken by looking the park square in the face. It's a picture taken from the park's point of view, showing what it sees. It's what the walker of its artificial hills also sees. Machinic perspectives. The crushed underbelly of a reconstituted land. Lines where the film has rolled back on itself leave vertical bleachmarks. Another machinic trace. If bruising could turn white in the sunny light of day.

The faint imposture of an architectural grid, however, holds the emotion in check: the same vertical bleachmarks of machinic bruising organise the visual field into a perfect Modernist square. The panorama is reproduced three times, a triple typtich of three-by-three, invoking the clean lines of Mies van de Rohe or Philip Johnson. Yet, the park overflows the confines of the grid, as waste space exceeds the neat lines of the architect's plan. The park remains passionate, empty, unclaimed and non-conforming. Pryor's title, S.T.T.L. gently mocks the jargonesque side of Modernisms', in apparent reference to de Stijl. But, it's the landscape which is still - still there, still still. The letters, S.T.T.L., are a common Latin abbreviation found on tombstones, and stand for "sit tibi terra levis" (may the earth lie light upon thee); in a kind of twisted logic it's appropriate to this ground and its ghosts, secular sacred space built on landfill.

The dialogue with Modernism carries over. Wart's paintings are formal, painterly and perfectly resolved: luscious textures of cream and asphalt with a de Kooning attention to line and gesture. A punctured mark of bleeding red is balanced by a line of intensity. There's a hint of an abstracted narrative which teases beyond the formal appeal of the works: the line is a spine or an arrow paring flesh; the heart a bloody mess. Wart, who, in her earlier canvases, can rarely resist telling a good yarn, in larrikin letters writ large in a delicate pointed hand, holds back. Likewise, a potentially too metaphoric play of blood, asphalt and flesh is tempered by the drama of the surface: the line of grey which holds its own against an expanse of whipped buttery whites. Excitement is in the lay of the paint.

Any attempt, therefore, to overstate, to load a meaning onto the delicately pencilled joints of the spine revealed, for example, or, onto a line of asphalt, as urban vector, surrenders to the abstract massing of paint. However, there's too much movement, or, rather, too much detail of the body, to reduce these works to paintings about painting, expressions of the materiality of the surface, slow drip and encrustations. Or quale of vibrating colour. Rather, there's an abstract plane and a material plane in operation here: a sublimated spiritual level working off tensions in a tactile body of material resistance.

Overall, it's tempting to overcode this exhibition with a kind of Deleuzian fold: a pleat of matter over the soul¹. Of course, the tone is wrong, for those readers for whom the mere mention of Deleuze's name has them off on the excitement of the nomadic rhizome, open-ended multiplicities and a-signifying lines of deterritorialization². I could argue for the rhizomatic grass and intensive affect in Pryor's work; subanatomies of molecular matter in Wart's surfaces, non-quantifiable nomadism of Marti's weavings. I wouldn't be convincing because these artists are all very much in dialogue with the Modernist frame, with the abstract Signifier of Minimalism, with dominant molar form. They work within it, not against it, within classical aesthetic norms. I might get away with such a discourse, however, were I to address readers of later Deleuze, who can see in his discussion of what is, after all, classical Baroque, the dialogue of passion and form.

Ann Finegan 1999

1. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). See the chapter, "The Pleats of Matter," 3-13.

2. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). See the opening chapter, "Rhizome," 3-25.