

Lois Dodd *Landscapes and Structures*

Alexandre Gallery April 10 - May 29, 2008

With the vibrant and saturated colors of *plein air* spring landscapes and closely cropped flora, Lois Dodd captures an optimistic view of modern rural life, though noticeably and curiously absent of people. Her *Landscapes and Structures* exhibition, a survey of paintings from 1969 through 2007 at Alexandre Gallery, rather than demonstrating a diversity of subject or approach, shows a remarkable consistency of an aesthetic vision grounded in the direct observation of reality and a sensitivity to oil paint.

These works relate to the outdoor domestic scenes Fairfield Porter painted in Southampton and the Great Spruce Head Island, with a directness of shape and form similar to Alex Katz. In *Window in Peak of Garage* (1975), a roof and overhang become a meditation on flattened light and shadow. As in Porter's observational painting, Dodd discovers an infinite range of grays in shadow while heightening the intensity of the sky's blue. In two paintings depicting clotheslines, *The Yellow House, Lincolnton* (1979) and *Yellow Curtain & Chicken Wire House in November* (1979), the shapes of towels or sheets are simplified into sagging rectangles, the forms distinguished only by the darker tones of their shadows.

In Fairfield Porter's career as art critic, he wrote an essay on Katz's painting, maintaining that Katz did not need to declare his interest in "reality," nor did he "need

to say that deepest reality is in visual experience, or in the paint medium as the medium for nature, or in communication, or emotion" because it was visually apparent in the work. Dodd too subscribes to this viewpoint, even at the dawn of digitization. Her paintings insist a heightened optical experience—looking with care and at great length. As a result, her paintings do not rely on superfluous concept, rhetoric or nuance.

Perhaps in the digital era, this sort of slow seeing and empirical vision (advocated in the extensive writings by Rackstraw Downes) is an "old fashioned" idea. In our modern lives, visual experiences and navigation through real space are increasingly mediated by digital displays: on computer screens, in taxis, at ATM machines, through digital cameras, cell phones, and multimedia PDAs. I can't help but wonder how much the digital screen is dulling our visual perceptiveness, our ability to distinguish between the virtual and tactile. In these experiences, the image is flatly composed of illuminated pixels and yet perceived with the depth of three-dimensional reality. Oil paint, on the other hand, offers a touch, saturation and magical luminosity through light penetrating a physical film of pigments that backlit pixels can never produce.

Dodd's paintings are in diametric opposition to the deadening slickness of digital media. These paintings



"Window in Peak of Garage," (1975), oil on Masonite, 20 by 16 in.

show us a reality unmediated by technology, moments we have missed by looking through a digital viewfinder in an attempt to capture a moment of light or atmosphere that can never be truthfully recorded by a machine. One must experience them as one experiences nature, in its simplest terms. In this most basic act, her paint is indeed a medium for a natural way of seeing.

—Greg Lindquist