

ART PAPERS

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ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jackie Saccoccio + Jeffrey Gibson, view of exhibition *Jackie Saccoccio & Jeffrey Gibson: THE SHADES* at samsøn, Boston [courtesy of the artists and samsøn, Boston];

JACKIE SACCOCCIO + JEFFREY GIBSON BOSTON

Given the lasting antagonism that plagues painting—years of critical indifference, multidisciplinary practices market dominance, the insistence on photorealism and figuration over abstraction, and so on—it seems almost confrontational to be a painter. Arguments for the “death” of painting have endured so far beyond the point of banality that the mere mention of the medium is cause for some to lose interest before understanding—or ever becoming aware—of what other work an artist might have up his sleeve. Fortunately, in *THE SHADES*, Jeffrey Gibson and Jackie Saccoccio don’t play their cards very close to their chests [samsøn; September 10–October 9, 2010].

The artists activate the entirety of the gallery’s narrow space. Ten black-and-white poster reproductions of Gibson’s color paintings plaster the right side of the gallery, playing off the paintings themselves. On the opposite wall, long drips and pools of paint in freely applied abstractions cover Saccoccio’s two large canvases, which rest atop her darkly colored wall painting. For both artists, flat, two-toned backdrops are so dominant, enveloping nearly the entire space, that their colorful three-dimensional counterparts seem almost certain to get lost. Instead, however, they become more prominent. The walls’ tonal similarity also creates an inevitable playing field for pitting one artist against the other.

In the end, however, it’s Gibson with the win. Slick-as-fuck, his paintings are highly contained eruptions of color, form, and depth that conflate airy accumulation: of oil on linen with sharp, tightly striped triangular forms; of acrylic and spray paint. The uniformly narrow stripes in his figures evoke both maritime and retro fashion affectations. They are also applied so delicately that they seem almost inherent to the fabric itself. Gibson’s brush work evokes Francis Bacon’s ghostly paint application with forms wafting to and fro like tufts of color anchored to oil. Swarms of brightly colored and loosely applied paint weave in and out of three-and-four-sided forms. The build-up of these shapes also echoes the painterly forms in his linen abstractions.

In a corner, a black-and-white digitally-woven cotton

tapestry is suspended on a wall near its painted original, *Looped*, 2010. While the color may be missing from the suspended fabric, the implied depth is left intact. This hyperawareness of dimensional tension makes Gibson’s paintings as tight as the lid on a pickle jar. Each composition—whether collapsing into a black hole of painted matter or expanding like a cloud of gas—is remarkably controlled, and the paintings are almost cocky in their ability to be both reckless and reserved.

Opposite Gibson, Saccoccio appears mostly reckless. Her work’s freeness seems almost crude, which is not to say that this isn’t her intention in the first place. Drips from her dark wall painting cascade down the side of the gallery. Inch after inch, the black and gray paint insists its form couldn’t possibly have been controlled any less. Swaths of black paint and nests of dark, painterly scribble are flung around her half of the space—along exposed beams, on circuit breakers, the ceiling, and the gallery’s glass door—in organically rendered forms that feel unnaturally artificial, down to the small pools of paint drawn out on the gallery’s gray floors.

Two sections of the wall are covered in a single translucent layer of white base—the “shades” in question. Applied by an industrial roller, it not only covers much of Saccoccio’s industriousness but also points to the attention to layering in her work. In yet another layer, two paintings are hung atop the white paint. Here, coats of oil, mica, and resin on linen reference this covering and recovering as trails of paint wash out previously executed ideas and weave with horizontal lines, layer after layer, until they settle into heterogeneous blobs of painterly effects. If Gibson is a neat freak, Saccoccio is a hoarder.

The work of a painter doesn’t stop at the stretcher. Despite the critical resentment that painting may—or may not—face, and in spite of the medium’s insistent limitations, this exhibition occupies a necessary place in the contemporary moment, when formal decisions outside the canvas—regardless of discipline—directly result from the practice of painting itself.

—Evan J. Garza