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GALLERIES

Wall-to-wall abstraction

Collaborative installation at samson

By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent | September 22, 2010

Jackie Saccoccio and Jeffrey Gibson title their exhibition at samson “The Shades,” a reference to an ancient Roman term for ghosts. But the show isn’t about loss, death, or palpable absence. It’s about contemporary abstraction. Consider this: There’s little new about abstraction; it’s full of the ghosts of painters past. To catch viewers’ attention, these artists brashly shove painting over a cliff’s edge into installation.

Saccoccio and Gibson each took an opposing, long gallery wall, and began with paintings on linen. Gibson’s 10 small pieces feature braces of crisp stripes, often in black and white, rotating this way and that, firmly bounded by colored borders. Other, more languid marks, airbrushed, spray-painted, and brushed on, add tone and a sense of touch. Frank Stella and Gibson’s Cherokee Choctaw ancestors ghost about in these works. Saccoccio’s two large paintings are far more Expressionistic, luscious, and painterly than Gibson’s, rapturous with colorful dabs and smears, drips and splatters, haunted by Jackson Pollock and Helen Frankenthaler.

What would have been a brainy dialogue about process — Saccoccio’s improvisation, Gibson’s careful building of pattern, space, and mark — develops into a face-off, perhaps of the kind couples in romantic comedies have before they succumb to one another’s charms.

Using Photoshop, Gibson made posters of his paintings, drained the posters of color, and plastered them like wallpaper in a dizzying grid all over his wall. He reproduced one as a woven rug in shades of gray, and hung it on a side wall. Saccoccio riffs on her paintings in clouds, drips, and operatic gashes all over her wall. She, too, restricts her wall work to black-and-white. Right in the middle, she slathers a section in white, erasing earlier marks, giving us breathing space.

Some of Gibson’s posters sneak around the gallery onto Saccoccio’s wall painting. Saccoccio has left her own smudgy marks on Gibson’s wall. The black-and-white walls were generated from or inspired by the paintings on linen. They may not be ghosts, but they are, in a sense, bloodless iterations of what might be seen as the living paintings. Bloodless, unbounded, and full of restless energy.

Saccoccio is guest curating an immersive collaborative exhibition, “Collision” at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art in November. Gibson will be a part of it. No doubt, this cheeky, moderately daring show is a taste of things to come.

Cate McQuaid can be reached at cmcq@speakeasy.net.

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