

Anna Kunz Paintings and Installations By James Yood, Fall 2000 for the exhibition catalog, "ANNA KUNZ paintings"

Painting often appears to be an art of surfaces, of stuff built up on a pictorial plane that eventually resides parallel to its viewer. Sometimes the actual process of painting can be pretty much a perfunctory activity that brings the artist to a place that he or she has largely predetermined. But the activity of painting can also be one of layering, of weaving and interweaving painterly incident, of means as much as ends, of seemingly ceaseless adjusting and rearticulating episodes of mark-making, of highly refined tinkering with intertwined decisions, each impacting the next, always subject to reconsideration and amendment. The paintings of Anna Kunz are very much of this latter type, more about the journey than the destination, and more committed to the search than the attendant discovery. Much of the visual interest of her paintings resides in the traces they retain of the many other moments that bubble and blister just beneath their surfaces, their memories still somehow embedded into the image we behold. Her paintings can be seen as states of vulnerable equilibrium, of having achieved delicate but hard-won resolutions that nonetheless seem fragile, poignant, and tenuously secure. These are paintings to root for, so at risk seems their equipoise, these odd junctions of power and grace. Like literature or music, these paintings are inherently sequential, visual passage in time, accreting towards ends of great formal acuity and satisfaction. To make marks that must in themselves be authentic and also find their place among a myriad of other marks is a special challenge to this kind of abstract painting. Her tools are just those we might expect – color, shape, space, volume, tone, brushstroke—and their use seems so thoughtful and judicious that it is sobering to discover the process through which Kunz usually employs these elements. She works on several paintings at a time, usually while seated on the floor, sometimes physically rotating them in execution, shifting and reorienting them, subjecting them to an almost instinctive to-ing and fro-ing. There are times when she purposely screws them up so she can unscrew them, moving them from chaos and impasse to some expectant zone that abuts right on the edge of balance and resolve. Imagination is her primary device, and an innate compulsion to bring something forth that can both excite and slow the eye, causing a succession of rethinkings and relookings that is incessantly engrossing. It is probably inevitable that the major formal element in Kunz's paintings is a somewhat eroded rectangular shape. Sometimes it appears as a pillowy square, or is tugged toward an ovalish lozenge shape, or even further into a fatty stripe. The source, the Ur-impulse, of this shape seems to be the proportions of the wooden panel of which it resides. Kunz prefers square panels, or ones that are slightly off-square, and their omnipresent edges, their indefatigable horizontal and vertical, become the opening formal element she must move toward some kind of fulfillment. And then the wonder begins; the moment her brush first touches her panel, Kunz is off on the exploration of what the second brushstroke should now do, and then the third, which, of course, causes a rethinking of the first, which then calls for a fourth, which now might mean that the painting should be turned 90 degrees, with a new color needed to answer what came before, and now a large element goes here, and then an outlined shape with some small ones over there (multiply by several thousand). And tomorrow, at the first sight of that work, it begins all over again, the search for reciprocity, a totally engaged stream of intercession made adept by long practice, the quest for an annealing of paint. But the edges of the panel never go away, and bulbous rectangular-like shapes, big ones, little ones, bright ones, done ones, start to populate the space. They pile up here and there,

generated by other ones that won't make it to the final surface, buried beneath their own descendants, early moments in an extended stream of being that moves somehow toward s paintinghood. Every inch of the surface partakes in this. Every tone and bit of incident, until the movement is reached in this process that tells her to stop. Kunz's color is subtly hyper-refined, even when it is jarring or dissonant, or so nuanced and symbiotic as to appear inevitable. The individual and independent evolution of her panels will make some inevitably cool or warm, upbeat or dreary, fragile or stern, sensual or not, pursuing the logic that their unique genesis generates. Anna Kunz' recent work in sculpture and installation does more than allow her to translate all of this into the third dimension, but that's a good place to begin considering them. A layering that was planar and subsumed within a surface now becomes planar and volumetric, a physical weaving that can immerse and insert it's viewer into an envelope of veils and disruptions, floating, indeterminate, environment creating. Paint becomes a thing, and things become paint, substance makes shadow and shadow makes substance, and your body walking through he layers becomes something of and apart in some dreamy but literal flow of accrual. She creates places as well as space, and can convey the curious sense of the viewer becoming very small, and placed within something that now seems incalculably immense and theatrical. It really becomes only the most overt of what is Kunz's casual tension, to heighten visual interest, to dally at the edge of pictorial dissolution and wreak some drama out of it, to make the act of looking become some sort of risky business, and to believe that looking at a painting can ( should? must?) sometimes make the pulse quicken. James Yood, 2000