

Art in America

REVIEWS MAY 16, 2014

Molly Zuckerman-Hartung

CHICAGO,
at Corbett vs. Dempsey

by Kyle MacMillan



Molly Zuckerman-Hartung: *au*, 2013, oil, latex and enamel on dropcloth, 80 by 60 inches; at Corbett vs. Dempsey.

From quiet mystery to brash exuberance, the 10 new paintings (all 2013) in Molly Zuckerman-Hartung's second solo exhibition at Corbett vs. Dempsey offered an unusually wide range of looks and moods—a diversity captured in the show's playful title, "Violet Fogs Azure Snot." Indeed, the ability of this ever-adventurous Chicago painter to find fresh, compelling modes of expression within the well-trod realm of abstraction has gained her national attention and a place in the 2014 Whitney Biennial.

While Zuckerman-Hartung looks back at art history and delights in the formal and technical intricacies of abstraction, she is intent on engaging the broader world as well. A multipage photomontage that opens the show's accompanying catalogue depicts subjects that have caught her attention, from gritty urban scenes to studio installations to a handmade sign emblazoned with the words "Pussy Riot"—images that at least indirectly inform and enliven her painting.

Unlike works from just a few years ago, these latest selections are large in scale—some as much as 84 by 60 inches—and seem more assertive from a painterly view. While collage and tactility are still important (in *io*, paint and wax are applied to a pleated canvas), these pieces are not as sculptural as their predecessors—no attached found objects and no dangling strips of painted canvas or leather tying works to each other. At the same time, the imagery is looser and more vibrant, and the surfaces appear less dense and heavily worked.

There is little precedent for meditative paintings like *i* or *oe* (most of

2 inches in height, that look vaguely like human chromosomes. The forms are rendered in black enamel, with bleach applied to some of them, revealing the naked linen beneath: pale slots that seem to glow when seen from a distance, creating a stunning, enigmatic effect.

Zuckerman-Hartung bought an industrial sewing machine a year ago and began experimenting with sewn and manipulated fabric, a technique that harks back to Alberto Burri and 1970s feminist artists like Miriam Schapiro. Its use figures prominently in many of these paintings, including the elegant *Calif.*, with its background of sewn-together strips of sea-blue linen subtly stained with rippled, watery forms. In *aii*, the artist incorporates an upside-down, purchased American flag, an inescapable pop icon, incongruously pairing it with sewn fabric panels covered with delicate washes and splotches.

Among the most eye-catching works in the show is *au*, which is dominated by a shifting diamond mesh pattern suggesting a certain illusion of three-dimensionality. Zuckerman-Hartung cut out the pattern from one half of a drop cloth and employed that as a stencil to apply the image to the other half, which she then stretched and used as the painting's support. Along the sides are thick pools of tan and green latex that were allowed to dry on the cloth. Faint lines of black are flung and dribbled on the surface.

Overall, this is a strong, engaging body of work—the perfect counterpart to the artist's Whitney spotlight and a springboard to what are sure to be Zuckerman-Hartung's future lively investigations into abstraction.