



Ann Pibal, *TRPHY #6*, 2008, Acrylic on aluminum, 12 ½" x 17 ½", From the six-part work *TRPHY*, 2008

## Ann Pibal

MAX PROTETCH

The paintings in this exhibition, Ann Pibal's second at the gallery, feature narrow rivulets of color zipping across and around monochrome backgrounds. They make clear that masking tape, with its chastening, restrictive qualities, is as important to the artist's practice as are acrylic-laden brushes. Look intently, and these taped-off lines perform various feats of optical magic. They carve space out of the featureless expanse on which they rest, interact playfully with the colors they abut, and, when Pibal has painted the edges of the thin aluminum panels on which she works, appear from certain angles three-dimensional, as if the painting were a skyscraper with setbacks. While not conventionally expressive, Pibal's paintings are nonetheless full of incident.

*TRPHY*, 2008, a work comprising six separate panels, was hung in Max Protetch's project space. The paintings are diminutive and share a strange palette: buttery yellow, salmon,

light blue, and greenish-brown lines on nearly black backgrounds. No two paintings feature the same composition, nor are any exactly the same size, though Pibal is clearly exploring the possibilities inherent within constraints: The width of the colored bands is constant, they travel only vertically or horizontally, and they never cross one another. Some lines reach the edges of the panel or wrap around it; others float, unattached, in the dark field. To one side of each narrow band trails a halo of black that differs subtly from the background and gives the colored lines the impression of motion. (I imagine the whole series as a time-lapse view of neon tubes flashing on a cinema marquee.) This sense of flux is a suitable metaphor for the artist's process. Despite her reliance on tape, which might preclude spontaneity, Pibal's working method is a search for rough visual harmonies and effects, not seamless perfection: Elements that appear symmetrical, such as the vertical lines in one constituent painting, *TRPHY #3*, are in fact just slightly off-kilter. This is the work of a confident painter building on historical precedent (Mondrian to Newman, Stella to Noland) and engaging with a new generation of talented abstractionists such as Tomma Abts, Kate Shepherd, and Dan Walsh. Like Abts in particular, Pibal focuses attention on the act of seeing itself.

These six paintings benefit from compression, both of the compositions onto small panels and of the panels themselves into a small room. A much larger, similar work—also titled *TRPHY*, 2008—hung alone on another wall. One is better able to see, at the larger size, the intricate tracery of brushwork bounded by Pibal's taped edges, yet the sense of movement and of contingency is lost in the shift of scale. A small nearby nook contained, one to a wall, three paintings from 2010, roughly the same size as the ones in the front room. As with any abstract work, there is the possibility that a composition will resolve into a representational image that a viewer cannot dismiss, and *XCRS* appeared to me as the iconic DK logo of the Dead Kennedys, reimagined by a hip Scandinavian graphic designer. I could not engage the painting on its own terms. In *SPTR* and *MNGO*, the image plane itself seemingly hiccups or stutters, allowing for what appears to be the doubling of certain forms on the left and right sides of the composition. But, again, look closely. In these and the best of Pibal's works, she addresses the ever-shifting, two-way relationship between the eyes and the mind.

—Brian Sholis