

Art in America

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ANNE PIBAL

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MEULENSTEEN

by david humphrey



Racing stripes can make cars look as though they are moving even when parked. Anne Pibal accessorizes her small painted aluminum panels to likewise imply motion, albeit warped and multi-directional. Her suave bandings, skewed subdivisions, broken patterns and sporty orthogonals toy with decorativeness as well as the more "serious" traditions of modernist and postmodernist abstraction.

This exhibition, called "DRMN" (all works 2011), consisted of 18 paintings, all under 18 inches tall or wide. Cryptic titles, such as *LSHTP*, *AFTMX* or *HNGRS*, seem to compress words or phrases so that their sense, like that of the paintings themselves, is merely suggested, impossible to confirm. Pibal's preferred compositional element is a very skinny rectangle that can function both as a structuring device, like a two-by-four or an I-beam, and a decorative motif, like a stripe. What seems at first to be scaffolding can change on second glance into patterned folly, while stylish geometric ornament can take on the muscle of a suspension bridge.

FLS2 suggests a building under construction, as blue beams of various thickness cant eccentrically into the frame. Dropping in from above are two pinkish stripes flying tiny, flaglike parallelograms. The blue structure contains a brushed, atmospheric passage, as though rainy weather has been captured within.

FLS2's precarious order oscillates between matter and mind-architecture in various states of being. In addition to architectural models, *AFTQ* and *DKNT* evoke shelving units and Art Deco marine décor. All the paintings tap the historically saturated languages of modern design, geometric painting and the meta-historical, death-of-painting abstraction of the '80s and '90s, like that of Gerwald Rockenschaub or Peter Halley. Pibal's bright lyricism, though, emphasizes a playful or poetic relation to those sources. Her irreverence and slippery vitality resist the stern regularities of ruled form.

Like the Proun paintings by El Lissitzky, minus his Suprematist utopian avant-guardism, Pibal's work is a task-oriented form of visionary creation. She invokes commercial or industrial production by means of standardized, repeatable components, but shuffles, limns and frames those elements so that they become idiosyncratic. And whimsical: tape is surely one of her tools, yet she uses it to make painted shapes that resemble tape. Her labor is precise; every decision feels sure and permanent, even as she is crafting a sense of improvised contingency. In Pibal's paintings, off-kilter seems right and inscrutability makes perfect sense.

Photo: Ann Pibal: FLS2, 2011, acrylic on aluminum, 17½ by 14¼ inches; at Meulensteen.