

Philip Martin Gallery

Art in America

PAMELA JORDEN

By Mark Van Proyen  November 30, 2011 5:23pm



Pamela Jorden, *Quarry* (2011). Acrylic and bleach on fabric, 33 x 33 inches. Courtesy of Romer Young.

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Pamela Jorden (b. 1969) is an emerging abstract painter whose work looks distinctly different from the “provisional painting” so visible in the past decade. Raphael Rubinstein coined this term in his widely discussed article of the same name, published in these pages in May 2009. Where provisional painting can be characterized by a rather theatrical lack of finish, Jorden’s work—although it likewise can have a casual quality—appears decidedly untheatrical. Hers moves toward a somber introspection that recalls Symbolist ideals, while also embracing a forward-looking vocabulary of very unconventional shape/pattern relationships.

The largest painting in this exhibition was *Vega* (2010, 54 by 40 inches). A bold, yellow, inverted triangle on a loosely applied gray ground spans the composition. A second central triangle, this one right side up, emerges as if in relief, pushing up from below the picture plane. Two of its sides have been traced by wobbly ultramarine lines that enliven the entire canvas. By virtue of its declarative graphic form and devil-may-care execution, *Vega* was the only work in the show that might be mistaken as an attempt at provisional painting. Yet, it seemed more an exploration of modernist principles than a flaunting of informality.

An untitled work from 2011, one of four circular compositions on view, offers a rich and intimate visual experience that balances soft shapes with forms bearing hard, decisive edges. Fluid areas of deep viridians and gray-violets give off a reflective sheen, the paint having been mixed with pulverized mica. The 33-inch-square *Quarry* (2011), which contains a busy assortment of intersecting lines and jagged shapes in whites and blues, suggests a mélange of dance-step diagrams superimposed over one another. As in the untitled circle, the brushwork ranges from crisp to free-flowing and the darker areas shift in chroma and iridescence.

Some of Jorden’s paintings engage with a neo-Op strain of abstraction, also popular during the past 10 years. But her works stand apart, due to their wide range of painterly elements and relatively small scale. They remind us that the true subject of any abstract painting is the position that it self-consciously takes in relation to the history of abstract painting.