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Denyse Thomasos

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Review

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Denyse Thomasos

Paintings 1995-1997

Lennon, Weinberg through July 29

By DOMINIQUE NAHAS

IT IS THE VARIETY OF OPEN lattice spaces above, below and between the scaffolding of brush strokes of Denyse Thomasos' that makes this original body of work worth seeing. This is an artist who is clearly in command of the way the stroke can be responsive to concretize various kinds of pictorial space as well as their slow dismantling. In order to do this she's had to become a specialist in the usage of a particular brush stroke which is applied loosely in short strokes in one direction, and yet again those same gestures applied against the grain of the first to create marks that are situated halfway between the grid and cross hatching marks traditionally used by engravers to exemplify volume and shading.

You can see her revving up in the small works (*CARNIVAL*, *WISH*, *SPELL*, *FENCE*, *RIPE*, all 1997) exercises really, in the gallery, that accompany the larger works. In these small images you realize that her unit of construction, while simple, is also potentially infinitely contractible and expandable. Her ambition is to create a grammatically rich pictorial language with what starts out as an elemental syntax of overlaid cross-barred brush strokes. Thomasos transforms her material by modulating the density of the tonal values of her colors as well as through the liquidity of her painterly strokes.

The energy of her paintings comes from a sure and direct handling of her

acrylic paint, and this is felt through her singularly expressive way of filling and creating passages of space that interlock, intermesh and glide between one. Well, I follow you, you might say; this grid-play sounds simple enough, you might think. But of course God (and the devil) are in the details for this consummate painter.

So let's get into details. The most important detail Thomasos has to consider is applying a standard of measure, proportion and calibration to her strokes, applied in the present-tense of the here-now of the painterly gesture.

First, deconstruct the painterly gravure strokes by paradoxically asserting the occasional aleatory stroke. Then, systematically repeat this simple structural visual unit by adding more of the same using different colors to the left, right, up, and down. Use the same strokes, but modify them gently allowing accidental drips of acrylic paint to mesh with the deliberate geometric structural scaffolding you're creating. Create a mesh effect. Slip in a weave effect. Interchange this with hints of fabric pattern effect. Attenuate the strokes.

Add an odd density to some areas of the overlays, and you have volumes of cube like areas to create allusions to building blocks (*URBAN JEWELS*, 1995). Expand. Now you've got buildings. Expand some more. Now you've got hints of urban neighborhoods built on the grids of city streets. Lengthen like taffy pulls several of the horizontal strokes, and some of the horizontal strokes. Layer them at the tops and bottoms of some of the works. Suggestions of exurban environments are implied. Rivers, parks. (*SPIN*, 1997, *SPELL*, 1997)

Now focus again, but in a different way. Pile up the grids using translucent whites and beiges and slate blues. Now you've got transparent effects. A kaleidoscopic collision of cubic volumes appears, intimations of the exterior of

buildings elided with the girded interiors of edifices. All of a sudden sheer poetry of compartmentalization takes form. Now take off. Make the spaces careen. Make them jut and swoop with the piling of brush strokes interspersed with arabesques and parentheses of lines (*HOWL*, 1997). Now you've got honey-combed cave dwelling effects. Here a Greek column; there the Acropolis. Now you've got sky. Now wind. (*ICE*, 1997). Now pull the rug from under yourself, refuse to pile up brush strokes for half of the other half of the pictorial field. It's free fall, the void, underneath the vertigo energy of cascading volumetric units at the top of the painting except for a few loose brush strokes at the edges (*SLING*, 1997).

Now, stop and rest as you bow for the plaudits. Here they come.

This is Denyse Thomasos' first New York solo show and she's given us an exhibition filled with consummate skill and flair. Her dramatic paintings, at their best, are light and graceful filled with breathtakingly taut yet expandable, energy. And we are all grateful for their appearance in our midst.