

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

REVIEWS

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Jessica Dickinson:
Give, 2010-11,
 oil on limestone
 polymer on panel,
 56 1/4 by 53 inches;
 at James Fuentes.

JESSICA DICKINSON JAMES FUENTES

Jessica Dickinson works on small groups of paintings over a very long time—as much as a year. Each is inspired by some chance observation or physical phenomenon, which, while it constitutes her starting point, will disappear as an image over the course of the painting's fabrication. The delicacy, even the loss, of the inspiring phenomenon is at odds with the almost overwhelming materiality of the finished work, which recalls Jay DeFeo's *The Rose* in its accreted weight.

For her paintings Dickinson uses custom-built rectangular wood panels verging on the square, which are scaled to her body. She begins by covering them with 10 layers of smoothed limestone polymer. She then proceeds to build layer upon layer of oil paint, sometimes mixed with wax, distressing, marking and smoothing as she goes. Each layer must dry before she proceeds. At various points along the way to completing a painting, Dickinson lays a large sheet of paper on its surface and makes a graphite rubbing, eventually producing groups of large drawings that she calls *Remainders*. These are both a record of the process each painting has undergone and

finished works in their own right, something like progressive states of a print.

In this exhibition, Dickinson showed four paintings from 2010-11, and eight *Remainders* based on a painting not in the group. It was an elegant, meditative display. There was a light and a dark gray painting, a blue one and an orange one. Each has an ineffable presence. You find yourself peering closely at the built-up surfaces, searching for buried images or trying to identify the position of marks in the depths. In *A/ways-A/so*, the orange painting, parallel rows of small gouges seem to mark the passage of time. A kind of glow around the top and side edges seems to emanate from behind a door or window. Similarly, in the blue painting, *Give*, a doorlike shape at the center makes you wonder if a door was, indeed, the inspiration for the painting—or perhaps a shadow falling over a door. The frame of that door shape is ragged, something like the edges of water-damaged frescoes in an old church.

Within the depths of the pale gray *Before/Beside*, there appears to be a kind of herringbone design—some lost composition, perhaps. In *Close/Close*, the central portion is opaque while the edges are marked with crinkly lines not unlike those

to be found in the *Remainder* drawings. In the paintings, history is collapsed, whereas time unfolds in sequence in the *Remainders*. The presence of the two

types of work inspires a kind of melancholia, as the drawings bespeak something that no longer exists, something irretrievable within the paintings. (That the *Remainders* in this show had nothing to do with the paintings only exacerbated a sense of loss.) The association with grave rubbings is almost unavoidable, adding an emotional punch to the knowledge that each drawing logged a transitory state. Once again, the artist achieves an intriguing paradox, as the architectural scope of the drawings is undermined by the ghostly delicacy of their markings.

—Faye Hirsch