

Jessica Diamond - Birmingham Museum Of Art, Birmingham , AL

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BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM OF ART

For this show, Jessica Diamond invited the public to come to the museum and watch her make monumental wall paintings. It might seem that such an offer would seek to reinforce the mythology of creative expression by suggesting that the value and authenticity of the work depend on the artist's physical production of it, but in Diamond's case, to see exactly how the paintings are executed is to see the artistic process, at least in part, demystified.

The paintings are realized from drawings projected onto the wall; for all their gestural immediacy, the final process itself is more akin to working from a stencil than to making spontaneous gestures. Furthermore, the paintings need not be in Diamond's own hand, though she always paints new work herself the first time. When she sells a wall piece, she delivers an image drawn on acetate, the right to paint it on a wall, and detailed instructions (though she leaves it up to the buyer to determine the size of the final image). She does not include her own installation services as part of this package--but the new owner can pay a little extra to have Diamond execute it.

Although this approach to making and selling art has obvious precedents in the procedures of Sol LeWitt, among others, it has often been aligned with work whose geometric precision seems equally detached. Diamond's coupling of such impersonal methods with paintings displaying all the markers of individual expression--idiosyncratic imagery, a gestural style, etc.--occasions renewed meditation on just where in the work the artist's expression resides.

Diamond's bold abstractions employ an accessible visual vocabulary that includes words, numbers, and a simple palette restricted to dark gray (almost black), yellow, and silver. These elements appear here in various combinations in four large paintings. *Up Storm* (all works 2000), the word "UP" slashed boldly in black against a bright yellow ground, has the graphic immediacy of a highway hazard sign. *If Cloud* offers a nebulous "IF" in silver against dark gray. In both paintings, the letters are cut off at the edges of the composition. While the presence of words here creates clear distinctions between figure and ground, the difference between positive and negative spaces is far less definite in the other works. *Two Storm with Lightning* integrates rounded areas of dark gray, branching yellow shapes, and the number 2. In *Erotic Cloud (No. 2)*, the composition is almost evenly divided between an area of dark gray on the left and one of silver on the right, which conjoin in the center in a tangle of scumbled silver and dark threads. In all the pieces, stark contrasts, big areas of unmodulated color, and gestural lines suggest straightforward connections between the visual effects of meteorological events and emotional states.

Diamond's conceptual project is provocative, though the issues she raises and the strategies she uses are familiar, even when deployed in a novel stylistic context. But the paintings' appeal in no way depends on their concept--they succeed on their own terms as lively and energetic abstractions to which Diamond's conceptualism adds a welcome ironic edge.

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