

ARTFORUM

Lucy Dodd

David Lewis

by Barry Schwabsky
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View of "Lucy Dodd," 2015. From left: Pastoral Peacock, 2015; Not Yet Titled, 2015. Photo: Jenny Kim.

An educational website I checked to make sure I was getting my mathematical terms straight tells me, "A trapezium is defined by the properties it does not have. It has no parallel sides." Bingo: That's the shape of most of the paintings in Lucy Dodd's show "Wuv Shop." Dating from 2014 and 2015—some made from such exotic ingredients as "Yerba mate, hematite, iron oxide, tetley's and pigments on canvas" (Mantice, 2015)—they were installed as if by chance, leaning against the gallery walls and one another, surrounding a couple of beat-up old couches, an old-fashioned sound system with a dual cassette player set amid lots and lots of cassettes pouring out of a suitcase and scattered all over the floor, as well as various other debris and a sort of uncovered hut made of five large painted canvases, the only rectangular ones in the show.

The paintings seemed to deserve a more refined installation than the ostentatiously casual way they'd been dealt with here—especially since there were clear signs, despite the offhand elegance of Dodd's way with materials, that taking care is part of her process. Example: Dodd has sewn fabric canvas strips onto the edges of the canvas, which she stretches over the frames, leaving a sewn line visible around the face of each canvas. I don't know why she does that, but it reveals a fetish for detail that suggests what some time spent observing the paintings confirms—namely, that while the mostly pale, spare stains, smears, and spritzes of matter that occur across the works' surfaces allow

for a good bit of randomness, the use of that randomness has been carefully thought through.

As my online source goes on to tell of the trapezium, “[s]ince it has no interesting properties beyond those of a quadrilateral, it is not used much in geometry.” Of course, the geometry of painters is quite a different thing from that of the geometers. Dodd clearly treasures the visual instability of the shapes she has chosen, which could have the graphic punch of Ellsworth Kelly monochromes were they not softened by the misty, murky veils and granular amalgams that inhabit them, reminiscent of those in some of Cora Cohen’s paintings. Like Cohen, Dodd invests a lot of her considerable energy in craftily evading the imposition of her own will on her work.

But then what about the situation—to call it an installation makes it sound more determined than it is—that Dodd has devised to put her paintings on the margins of? At first it seemed a little too willfully boho. The exhibition-as-aftermath-of-the-opening trope just makes me feel like one of the uninvited, and I’ve never shared the apparently widespread nostalgia for cassettes; catching sight of forgotten releases by Ziggy Marley, Seal, or even the Beautiful South doesn’t set my heart aflutter. But I’m always glad to have something to sit on while I look at and think about paintings. On my second visit, I found the furniture had been rearranged, as had the paintings—one now seemed to serve as a half-opened door to the main gallery space. Lots and lots of magnetic tape had been unspooled and strewn everywhere, as if a very messy mechanical spider had been trying to spin a web around the room; this somehow made everything more fun. Someone kneeling on the floor sorting through the cassettes turned out to be the artist. A big rectangular canvas was spread out on the floor, obviously in the midst of being worked on. At that moment, the exhibition had become a studio. It was no longer about the aftermath but about the groundwork, and I felt I’d been invited to peek over the artist’s shoulder.