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Lucy Dodd: 'Cake 4 Catfish'
David Lewis Gallery
88 Eldridge Street, near Grand Street, Lower East Side
Through Sunday

by Roberta Smith
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Early last year, Lucy Dodd had a stunning show of three big, strangely vaporous yet gritty paintings in an uptown gallery, organized by David Lewis. Now she has gone all out in a big space suffused with a distinct SoHo aura. If the first show introduced her talent, this one stresses her large and versatile ambition, which takes in painting, several kinds of eccentric sculpture and works on paper, as well as implied performance. It is impressive but not quite as convincing.

The entrance to the show is a cheerfully funky corridor that resembles a bohemian bazaar. It is crowded predominantly with bunches of twisted fabric and colored string, evoking engorged rag rugs or runaway macramé, that are variously affixed to chair frames or table bases made of chrome steel, wrought iron or Plexiglas. The suggestion of craft, traditional women's work and a little black magic reinvigorating Modernist severity is hard to miss.

The dark-stained, somewhat irregularly shaped canvases leaning about in this passageway and dominating the main gallery on a much larger scale make the same point more covertly. They frequently evoke a less self-consciously aesthetic version of Lyrical Abstraction, but the checklist reveals that their stains involve all sorts of natural substances – spirulina, nettles, kombucha, yew berries, the urine of Ms. Dodd's dog – along with charcoal, mixed pigments and graphite. Rubbed areas suggestive of floorboards indicate that the works weren't painted so much as they simply accumulated, while lying flat, and that different activities – whether culinary, medicinal, or ritual – were conducted on top of them.

Except for their physical structure of canvas carefully sewn to canvas-covered stretchers, these paintings lack the rigor and inherent strangeness of those in Ms. Dodd's previous exhibition. Still, she is undoubtedly a one-of-a-kind artist, and when she gets her talent and her ambition aligned, look out.

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