

Art in America

Lucy Dodd NEW YORK, at David Lewis

by Alexander Shulan
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New York-based artist Lucy Dodd opened “Cake 4 Catfish,” the first solo show at David Lewis’s new Lower East Side gallery, with what was advertised as a “Pescatarian Pot Luck.” Standing in the gallery’s main room, she served fried catfish and a pungent soup to visitors. On the walls were a series of massive canvases, smeared with such unusual materials as nettles and iron oxide. With their powerful smells, the paintings seemed to be fermenting in the space, aptly complimenting the anarchic atmosphere of the opening, which concluded with attendees throwing birthday cake at one another’s faces.

Dodd received her MFA from Bard College in 2011, and “Cake 4 Catfish” followed recent solo outings at the New York uptown gallery No5A and Los Angeles’s Blum & Poe. Her works bear comparison in scale and flair to those of fellow painter and art-market darling Oscar Murillo. Both artists make large paintings featuring chaotic topographies of smudged marks and stains that clearly exhibit the process of their creation. While Murillo leaves errant sawdust, dirt from the floor and stray marks of paint purposefully in place, Dodd’s choice of materials produces a whimsical, shamanic affect. Including walnut rind, yerba maté and kombucha, the substances used would be comfortably at home both in a farmer’s market and a cultic ritual.

“Cake 4 Catfish” took over the hallway of the gallery’s entrance with a disorderly installation of ramshackle furniture and paintings. A series of Breuer chairs with seats of woven ropes were arranged in no particular order, rhombus-shaped paintings were left to lean against the walls, and oddly proportioned glass tables were placed haphazardly about the space.

The clutter stopped at the main room, however, allowing for a better view of Dodd’s paintings. The enormous pair of canvases comprising *2 Doors*, *1 Tomb*, *Coming through the back-side of death* (all works 2013), each nearly 10 feet high by 8½ feet wide, created a kind of portico at the room’s entrance. The diptych, which smelled strongly of the organic matter used in its frenetic composition, resembled a sumi-e landscape; the painting’s heavily worked foreground was akin to a geologic formation pulled up from deep underneath the ground.

Perpendicular to the diptych, “Beyond Blind,” a trio of 9-foot-tall canvases, occupied a whole wall. Consisting of series of overlapping stains, the paintings were much less saturated and frenzied than *2 Doors*; the dirty washes of color—mostly brown and black, but with tinges of green and red here and there—gave way to the matte linen of the background.

Written by Lewis following extensive conversations with Dodd, the show’s press release revolved around the term “/cake/.” Though the text read mostly as a mockery of the theory-laden language used to sell expensive paintings—“the sign /cake/ within the marked (solar) discourse of painting,” for example—“/cake/” also seemed to symbolize Dodd’s unique style of painting. “It is not merely that one particular intellectual was once surprised and affronted by /cake/, but, conversely, and more broadly, that /cake/ is, by definition, always a surprise, always what one finds smeared, excessively, and in the wrong way, on one’s face.” Therein is Dodd’s turbulent approach to her medium: an excessive smearing of material, the resulting smells and the abandon of the work’s creation surprising and possibly affronting, which makes more reserved painting feel stale in comparison.



Lucy Dodd: *Beyond Blind* (1981 ½), 2013, foss leaf extract, sumac extract, black lichen, yerba maté, graphite, urine, annatto and mixed pigments on canvas, 117 by 117 inches; at David Lewis.