

# Review: Amy Sillman Returns to Figurative Motifs

By ROBERTA SMITH FEB. 25, 2016



"Table 2" (2015), included in Amy Sillman's new exhibition, "Stuff Change." Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

Artists sometimes move too fast, abandoning parts of a personal style that deserve development. And so, in some of the best paintings of her career, [Amy Sillman](#) steps back from abstraction to reassert the ambiguous figurative motifs from her earlier paintings, which conjure cartoons, modernist abbreviation and a persistent eroticism. "Stuff Change," the show's title, bluntly suggests artistic growth, but is also a literal translation of "stoffwechsel," the German word for metabolism.

The renewed suggestions of bodies — fragmented or weirdly appended — have benefited from the more assured brushwork and colors of Ms. Sillman's relatively abstract paintings. There's also a new architectonic solidity and simplicity. You may not know if a leg is human or furniture, but it is defined,

maybe has a shadow and is usually isolated against a slab of solid color — a vibrant blue or saturated green that evokes the early Matisse of "[The Conversation](#)" or "[Blue Window](#)."

Teasing ambiguities flourish, along with strange little folds that might be flesh (see "Tough Girls"). The suspended two-legged form in "Table 2" could be pantyhose hung out to dry or a person bent vulnerably over on a table. The title "Back of a Horse Costume x 2," clarifies the work but doesn't becalm the active play of violet, green and gray strata. These new paintings are beautiful and funky; elegant but attuned to the messiness of desire; luxurious in their materials and reworkings yet economical.

And they have company. Ms. Sillman has lined a back gallery with a panorama of 14 canvases, using stained acrylic (not oil), inkjet-printing and ink painting to create a panorama of dark bobbing shapes and calligraphic marks. The results are generic but introduce a new, intriguing side of her sensibility.

A problem affecting all the paintings is a tendency toward decorousness. In an animated video made from Ms. Sillman's drawings, two women repeatedly throw stones. There should be more of this recklessness on canvas, not exhibited adjacent.

---

Amy Sillman

'Stuff Change'

Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

530 West 22nd Street, Chelsea

Through March 12

A version of this review appears in print on February 26, 2016, on page C25 of the New York edition.  
Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe

Email

Share

Tweet

Pin

Save

More