

MOUSSE

The Belladonna of Time: Amy Sillman, “Temporary Object” at Thomas Dane Gallery, Naples
by Estelle Hoy

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Amy Sillman, “Temporary Object” at Thomas Dane Gallery, Naples, 2023. © Amy Sillman. Courtesy: the artist; Gladstone Gallery, New York; Thomas Dane Gallery. Photo: Roberto Salomone

Amy Sillman is thoroughly committed to grafting the *neither/nor* of aesthetic strokes. She refuses to pledge allegiance to the militant catechism of the artistic outcome: what takes, what doesn't, what grows, what turns to ash, what fastens, what detaches. Planting untimely painterly grafts of double exclusion to canvas in *Temporary Object* at Thomas Dane Gallery in Naples, Sillman produces imbalanced rhetoric, asserting that her works are neither moored objects nor temporal, shadowy silhouettes. One might say that it is precisely when an artist proclaims their total freedom (as from any a priori judgment) that their *neither/nor* is least debatable.

Inosculation occurs when the friction between two trees causes the outer bark of each to scrape off at the point of embrace. In response, they produce callus tissue that grows outward, increasing the pressure between the saplings, kissing into, inward, and against, making small mouths that pair shared breath and minted expectoration. It's mostly common for branches of the same species to grow together, though inosculation may (or may not) occur across related species. Sillman's aesthetic transfers are neither denied nor embraced, neither abstract nor figurative—an unpersuadable arbiter endowed with a temporal ideal, unfolding *neither/nor* at various speeds. Pickled aesthetic velocity is an uncomfortable, contractionary procedure (there is no escaping the human desire for directed ideology), and the artist comes quite naturally to weigh the pans of its rusted scales. *Queenie* (2023) breaks gestural bread with *The Bronze Decor* (2022), and *In Rio* (2023), transplanted cuttings of prismatic acrylic juxtapositions: assembled green-leaved strokes, orange insouciance, bronze, weepy bone broth, and mustard. Jigsawed edits and arrangements in recalcitrant paprika, gray, persimmon, and carmine red set out on their partisan adventure of crude negation. Large-scale paintings of vibrant *carnaval* that move and bounce in noncommittal gestures, abstaining from time because they can. Past, present, and future, is *neither/nor*.

Splashy arraignments that take the viewer to the formal edge of artistic discomfort, fragmenting minutes, fastening temporality to neither linen canvas nor the fraudulent dependability of air—Sillman wrecks everything. That being so, she has learned to hold fast to nothing. Everything slips through her turpentine fingers: slow-drying welts of blue, dianthus pinks, Matissean mugs, shielded torsos, breezy Queenies, ashy Wednesdays, and ashier Mondays. Sprinkled with gray and black, *Monday* (2022) draws a Stygian demarcation line down the middle of a weekday in bold red ink, refusing serialism and Babylonian divisions of lunar cycles. Throwing out the Sumerian calendar, we follow. On either side of the liberal red partition, gray cinders and peppered Naples yellow bow to an unsuccessful graft, and black molded black on the left side is left to its own devices. What's been sustained over a moment, an hour, days, months, and years is spliced and discarded—total faux pas. Sillman's paintings suggest that time is separate from us, residing in evaporated fumes of acrylic or fleeting sounds of the fete and early Lent, things linked to failed scions that recur periodically, confirming the atrophy of clocks and fainting cinnabar. Standing outside the festivities, disinherited from time, the artist shaves the dictates of our daily bread; small ink works on paper serve as a reminder of what was and could not remain. Talent is always balanced by foible. Each piece in this series is titled after a lost Norse god, wife of Frigg, Saturn, or personification of moonshine: *Monday*, *Tuesday*, *Wednesday*, *Thursday*, *Friday*, *Saturday*, *Sunday*, and *Next Monday* (all 2022).

Next Monday stitches up tempo through tadpole-like shapes and cerulean whale flukes, swimming toward and away from each other in hurried constriction—day of the week as a form of compression chasing a future hour preparedly foreclosed. Waxy crayon swirls in green and Valencia orange peeled back to petulant adolescence, flappable, angsty shapes in spasmodic kinesics, failing to reach the edge of the canvas. For people, memories of time are associated with *ephemeral* moments: midsummer poppies and milk vetch, eating crabmeat and sardines, avoiding perennial belladonna at Lake Como or Due Mondi, or fasting for Wednesday Lent. The act of remembering can do nothing to reaffirm our sense of steadfast continuity. It can only substantiate the serrated nature of an epoch and the belief that we belong to a collective register. Everything in this series is as if Sillman is playing a defamatory game, a certain bold immaterial light ennobled by divine right, arbitrating the well-defined system of divisions. Without effusing about the myth of temporality implicit in any appeal to the eternal culture of systematic determination, Sillman manages the careful style of choosing not to choose. *Neither/nor*.

At every second in time, next to the things that feel natural to do, say, and see—no less by art or books, *larghetto* rusted memory, or sequential narratives—reside other things that are hushed. But then Sillman breaks the silence to find out what that is, moment by moment, little by little, and suddenly one Monday next, colors excise, and undeviating frameworks are shattered. We hardly remember life before, when the concept of time was viable momentarily and one could bank on the steady meter of moments being a sibylline diversional strategy. It's been a long day without you, my bosom friend, time. Sillman oils up linen with athleticism, rendering *Torsos with Shield* (2023) and *Torso with Green* (2023), trunks poorly grafted to limbs and heads. Silkscreened onto paper, the body thrown into segments, a loosely perceived shield in white and black stripes fortifies a subdued figure living in a broken-down season. The quilted padding of emotional armor takes a short-lived, scrappy absence, a *piccola pausa*, from welded attachment and the tribunal for more chaste proclamations against form. Passionless black-gray consumes the paper, with a light spill of mustard in the top right quadrant, a smear of groomed vinegar yellow changing directions at the hands of an artist who lost track of the hour, day, year . . .

Her mechanism of double exclusion arranges itself in a new way; colors are located, appear, smear, and reappear over the sorry computation of a changed mind. True, our world may be subject to certain alternations of decisiveness, but you can be sure that for this aesthetic scission, there is no salvation for time. Grafting flesh of *verde* to the fringe of the paper, *Torso with Green* takes brokenness and chronology and sews it to movable durations, an impossible pursuit. That is, if you aren't Amy Sillman. Leafy bubbles of hematite quiver, froth, and foam underneath the solid lines of an assured shield, discrete lime aeration that conducts a slow, lyrical, long-suffering impact. Quiet bubbles that will be the greatest. But this hardly suggests an everlasting methodology. All her leisurely marks dissolve into tiny, joyous drawings of broken-down immediacy through forty-one digital diagrams on printed aluminum, a *bande dessinée* depicting the arduous stages of a painting created yet absent, finished yet deconstructed, hurried yet slow going. In *Temporary Object* (2023, and the show's namesake), abbreviated strokes of black and turkey white make euphoric reference to celerity, circling sectioned days she'd already dissolved in her week-to-*weak* serialism. There is nothing to hold back from. Pounced on and enjoyed, *Temporary Object* is the quick-moving story of a new name, pure of all fixities and consecutive boldness, washing out stationary determinations.

We win nothing.

Impelled to nausea by temporality, Sillman—the belladonna of time—is true to her word. She gets a weird feeling and knows that her interference and exchange with a painting is done. Pressing new wine and pure indiscretions via capricious artworks, she takes to the miracle recourse, ever the adepts of refusing a bipartite universe of which one would constitute time divine. Oh, those nasty systems of time! Where the silence of temporality starts to form, the artist neither banks on artistic inosculation nor denies its potential, future effervescence.

Time simply slipped away without any meaning.

at Thomas Dane Gallery, Naples
until July 29, 2023

Amy Sillman (b. 1955, Detroit) is an artist based in New York since 1975. After studying Japanese language at NYU, she received a BFA in painting in 1979 at School of Visual Arts in New York, and then an MFA in painting at Bard College in 1995. While an undergraduate, Sillman was told by a teacher that she had to "decide between" figuration and abstraction, and ever since, her work has been based on proving that binary (and others) wrong. Instead, she welcomes contradiction and dialectics into gestural painting procedures, working both fast, improvisationally, and slow, with a nearly archaeological process of accumulation and redaction of innumerable layers. Over the past fifteen-plus years, Sillman has added writing, curating, zine making, animation, and site-specific installations to her practice. Her work is held in numerous private and public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Tate Modern, London; the Museum Brandhorst, Munich; and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm. A mid-career traveling survey show, *one lump or two*, curated by Helen Molesworth, originated at the ICA Boston in 2013 and was accompanied by a catalogue. In 2019 a monograph by Valerie Wade was published by Lund Humphries, London. In 2022 Sillman participated in the International Exhibition of the 59th Venice Biennale, *The Milk of Dreams*. Besides her work as a painter, Sillman often writes on art, and her bibliography includes *Faux Pas*, a book of collected texts and drawings published in 2020 by After Eight Books in Paris. Her own work has been written about regularly in journals such as *Artforum*, *ARTnews*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *Frieze*, and other publications. Sillman is represented by Gladstone Gallery, New York, and Capitain Petzel, Berlin, and shows with Thomas Dane Gallery, London and Naples; Campoli Presti, Paris; and Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles.

Estelle Hoy is a writer and art critic based in Berlin. Her second book, the critically acclaimed *Pisti, 80 Rue de Belleville* (After 8 Books), was released in 2020 with an introduction by Chris Kraus. She is currently working on a book of essays and collaborating on a book and exhibition with Camille Henrot for ICA Milano. Hoy regularly publishes in the international art press. She is editor at large for Flash Art International.