Let me speak first of what isn’t in the room at FLUX. The extraordinary work of software artist, Scott Draves is not in the room but his language is in the air. If you drift to a table at the heart of this cunningly curated show, and take up a sheaf of good-old-fashioned hard copy, you will have this shepherd’s link in hand, and can find the Electric Sheep – these exquisite math-sensual inventions are released as open source, moving freely in algorithmic self-perpetuation like smoke, like flocking sheep, continually evolving, taking surprising turns, holding your attention with their acrobatic dance.

Coming into the Speaking in Tongues exhibit, what is present on the wall at right are three abstract symbolist canvases from the Playing Dead series of Anne Pomponio. Pale veil, lace-like, mask enigmas that are not entirely free from menace. The two smaller acrylic panels mirror themselves in simple but effective symmetry. The larger piece, an oil, reveals and obscures a haunting, subtle form that is in a structural relationship with its companions but which stands apart from them in its evocative, dream power and its three-dimensional force. Anne Pomponio has suspended and anchored us in the eternal, elliptical feminine.

Next in, from floor to ceiling, comes an imposing grid of working pages from the notebook choreographies and wordplays of veteran and perpetual rebel, Arleen Schloss. This is the amalgam of performance formalized, of process in progress, of personal languages in progressive, visual de-evolution. In some way reminiscent of the meticulous, playful accumulations of Paul Klee, this Arleen Schloss installation builds the degradation of an image in series through copy of copy of copy. I say “builds” because, in these deft hands, degradation is re-gradation, and loss is surely gain. Arleen’s wall might be a performance in itself – a self-referential square dance of sorts, but formal, though it may be, it’s a dance that is very far from square.

Julio Valdez takes a corner to himself. It’s a small corner with a big presence – a quartet of prints that have already had paint applied in part before being photographed, and which will again be painted, in an ongoing media layering that offers another
example of work in progress where the process is the work. In Islas Mariposas, Julio Valdez has overlaid butterfly outlines, pelvic remains of Rorschach sensuality – map on map (Cuba/Hispaniola) – with a lucid, Hockneysque aqua tracery. The images are at once dark-opaque, and light-transparent, reflecting the split personality of the bright and treacherous Caribbean. But danger and insular poverty are not immediately upon one’s mind. The winding contours and cool tones of these images seductively evoke the rich face of polished onyx – another ancient complexity – or the elegant distortions of twisted glass and windblown water. Ambiguity lingers.

In a display format echoing that of Arleen Schloss, Jim Hett fills the end wall with another formal patchwork of letter-sized works – an impressive distillation from the more than 300 pieces comprising his series They’re All The Same Except They’re All Different: EL... Most every one of these individual works is grid-like in itself, so the parts reflect the whole, and each component seems to genetically suggest the rest – an extended family of close and distant relatives. The theme is mundanity, the language mode verbal, hieroglyphic, literal – a litany of transcendentals lists and pictographic inventories in which each playfully mimics each. Credulity-stretching, though it be, Hett’s manifests are (almost without exception) manual in production. Many a latter-day trompe l’oeil is meticulously crafted with microscopic care so that pencil looks like print and the pen resembles press. To see is not to believe.

As we swing back on ourselves and head along the other flank of the gallery, we meet the refreshing contrast of seemingly simpler, less analytical forms from another artist – of paper folded and painted with a child-like freshness, of house paint drooled and marbled in apparently random relationships – bands of bright color from the hand of Ellen Hackl Fagan. But the simplicity is deceptive. Hackl Fagan has arrived at these works by tapping synesthetic harmonies – her colors have been picked and placed by others, in a spontaneous, unconscious interaction between sight and sound. I was present when, with technical assistance from cognitive scientist, Michael Cole, matches were repeatedly made between a range of simple colors and notes from the Do Re Mi scale. Through this ColorSoundGrammar Game, Ellen seeks to reveal a shared translation embedded in us all – acting as a medium to reveal an unspoken consensus of pairings between what is seen and what is heard. I felt that consensus in myself and I saw it in others – a mysterious but palpable spectrum.

Last in the turn of the room, is a vibrant, airy installation by Suzan Shutan. Bird Myth Series: Flock, is a long, interactive wall of brightly colored pom poms that dance on slender wires. Even passing by can cause them to move – to ebb and flow like a murmuration of the starlings they represent. To run a hand through this flock is to see the nebulous made tangible. As the wave running through a field of windblown flowers delineates that unseen current, so your intervention is reactively patterned in this. But these bright buds are iridescent birds, rising and falling, shifting in space, each in its own space, keeping its place in a collective order that swells and collapses by shared intuition. When you open the gallery door to leave, look back – you might see your wake quietly subsiding, settling in your absence.

George Murphy
January 11, 2013

Speaking in Tongues was curated by artist Ellen Hackl Fagan. This exhibition runs through January 27, 2013. In tandem with the artwork there is a series of weekend events with visiting performers, poets, linguists and scientists, all of whom use invented languages in their work.

For more information, please consult the gallery website.

www.artinfluxharlem.com/calendar

Related Posts

New York Art Book Fair 2013
KALIPTUS: Visions of the Transpersonal
Let’s Play in the Fountain Art Fair
Picture This: The Sun Shines Twice on Tracey Emin
Smart Car + Fallen Fruit = One Cool Ride

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

SUBMIT YOUR AR TO BE A FEATURED ARTIST

FIND US ON YOUTUBE

BLOGS WE LOVE