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IT IS WHAT IT IS: IN THE STUDIO WITH JANE FOX HIPPLE

Boston artist **Jane Fox Hipple's** new work for **DODGE**gallery in the Lower East Side of New York isn't just remarkable for the process that it emerged from, but that it also marks her first paintings to be exhibited in a solo show. A preparator for the **Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston (ICA)**, Hipple has been honing in on her process for years—and it shows in the work. Her loyalty is to the materials she uses, and to the medium of paint itself, revealing a years-long examination of materiality, subjectivity, and concreteness.

Much of her recent work is a departure from her previous practice, moving ever closer to an appreciation for these works as physical objects in addition to their compositional abstraction. Aligned with contemporary Concrete artists like John Zurier and Joseph Marioni, Hipple's work is a study of the properties of color, light, and material, with marks and compositions as elegant as they are deeply assertive. I caught up with the artist in her Somerville studio, not far from Harvard Square. Our conversation, and more pics, after the jump.

—Evan J. Garza, Editor-at-Large

EJG: Where were you coming from in preparing this body of work for DODGEgallery?

JFH: I made a body of new work in New York last summer in a studio in Red Hook... Kristen and Patton were really interested in what I was doing. It was egg tempera work at that time, I was making my own paint—in an effort to save money and because I'd done a fresco the previous summer and that experience seemed very important and necessary in my work. Prior to that, I'd only done oil painting and I was making the same marks or honing in on the same painting over and over again. With the fresco, it was much lighter and pared down formally. Being in that space of not knowing, of learning, was what the work needed.

With this body of work, I just moved into this studio after coming back from the summer. Kristen and Patton took all the work that I had made in Red Hook and put it in their first show. So, it was a challenge. Here I am in this new space,

starting from scratch, and they want to do a show. It's an exciting place to be, but it's also a vulnerable, scary place to be in. The work instantly took a dramatic shift. I don't know what fully conspired to make that happen, but the first piece that I made is the one directly behind you. It started with egg tempera and then I reintroduced oil. And found that I was comfortable using oils again, and was able to suspend my years of knowledge with it and reincorporate what I learned through fresco and egg tempera.



...Trying a different mark and varying the mark, exacerbated by a kind of honing in and paring down of form, has led the form of these paintings to become veils. The surface operates as a masking system, with the framing devices and the hole poking through—sometimes stuffing the hole—bringing up another conversation about these things as objects, blurring the distinction between subject and object. So, it's really about materiality and the tactile. That's why you paint.



Tell me about your residency at Skowhegan. Were there changes to your work during that period?

That was a really hard time for me. I really struggled while I was there... What I was pushing myself towards at Skowhegan and finally figured out with that fresco, was a way of evoking the body and the visceral nature of paint and natural material, and I was able to do that in a way that wasn't so much about representation or symbolization, but something closer to—maybe truth isn't the right word—something that's emotively present without having to be anything but what it is... I was not always having fun, but it really opened up a way for me to find myself in my work. What I've found now is a way to make work that doesn't have to be everything. It can be what it is. And I don't have to force everything into one painting.

I think it means more when the materials do most of the talking, when it is what it is, in terms of forcing it to be something else.

It was really hard to learn that. It was about letting go... I think I've really found a way to celebrate the doubt in belief, and much like my favorite painters, expressing that doubt in belief, and constantly pushing what that means, is what it's about.

Jane Fox Hipple, *The Good in the Bad*, 2010
Oil and spray paint on panel with a hole
stuffed with black t-shirt, 24 x 18 inches



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How much liberty do you give yourself with the final compositions? How much talking do you do and how much talking does the paint itself do?

I don't know what these are going to be. So, the scariest part is the blank canvas... It's also really liberating making something to respond to, and then responding to that, and then responding to that. The hardest part is knowing with absolute certainty that you have the final composition. Because that can change, just like anyone can change from day to day, week to week, month to month, so what's a finished painting one day might change. It's not about making this finished product, it's about pushing who you can be and what it can be.

Is it ever really finished, anyway? Because the practice certainly never is.

No, it's not. It's really about the practice, you're right.

I think the most exciting thing about your work, at least recently, was to see it move to a real conversation about materials and—correct me if I'm wrong—but moving to a place where you're really talking about objects. The painted bricks, paintings installed near other objects, and creating that kind of tension opens the door to a whole other conversation about painting.

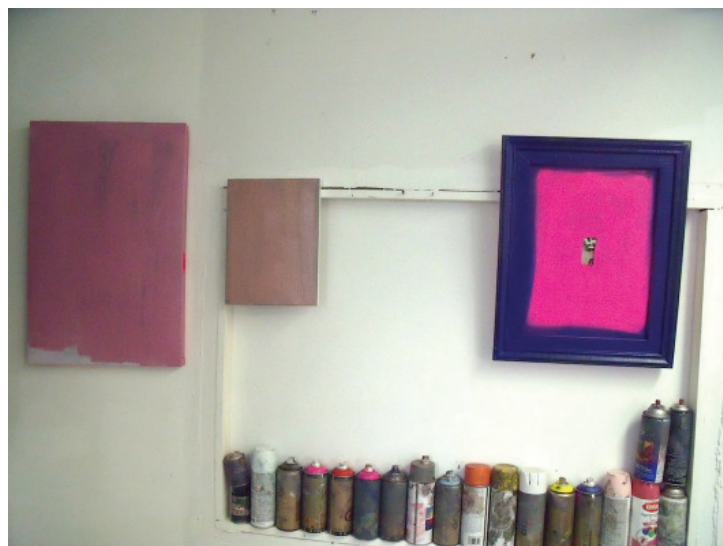
Yeah, definitely, because part of the challenge is that there's this expectation that with an artwork, you approach it and it gives you an answer. It would represent something and it would tell you what it means. That's limiting something, which could be emotional or psychological. My work's not about providing those answers. I think the masking [of color/form] is more about revealing than it is about covering it up.

I couldn't agree more. And that's something that's really inherent to Concrete Painting and a lot of Color Field painting, and what they're after is really about revealing layers, exposing color, and exposing light... painting color, and really allowing the viewer to be exposed to the capability of the material.

There's that constant longing for satisfaction, understanding concreteness, and I think that what I'm trying to do with these paintings is hover in a space that's a slippage between that concrete sense of holding versus longing for something that's not going to fold neatly into your subjectivity.



Jane Fox Hipple, *Given(s)*, 2010
Oil and egg tempera on panel,
35.5 x 28 x 2.5 inches



What are you looking forward to the most by showing with Robert de Saint Phalle?

Rob's work is in dialogue with mine in the sense of masking and veiling in order to reveal and slow things down. I also think my work has a strong feminine sense to it, and his has a more analytical side.

Really? I feel your work is so masculine. It's so straight forward. It's still sexy, but it's very direct. He's not fucking around, he's going to give it to you straight.

Well, that's nice to hear! Robert's a pro, and he's going to bring it. And I'm going to bring it too because this is my first opportunity to share my work with an audience, and that means a lot to me. I've been doing this for a long time and it hasn't always been easy. And I get to be in New American Paintings at the same time. It's very exciting.