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EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Joan Thorne: *Jarabaco*, 2010, oil on canvas, 66 by 56 inches; at Sideshow.

JOAN THORNE SIDESHOW

Abstract painter Joan Thorne consistently takes the risk of embracing pure expression. Born in New York City, she came of age in the third generation of the New York School. Her widest recognition came during the '70s and '80s, as evidenced by a solo exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., in 1973 and two appearances in the Whitney Biennial in New York (1973, 1981). More recently, retrospectives were mounted in Santo Domingo (1998) and Puerto Rico (2000). The solo at Sideshow was her first since 2005.

The show's 12 recent canvases, bearing a certain structural affinity to the work of the slightly older Elizabeth Murray, develop a vocabulary for pictorial movement that stands in marked contrast to Murray's cartoonish playfulness. Rather than explore movement through a sculptural extension of the canvas, Thorne instead seeks inner relationships between forms, which produces esoteric shapes on the painting's surface. Her bright palette and sharp boundaries are musical, with large grounding masses and radiating waves swirling above them, like sound made visible in an aquarium.

Such reliance on exuberant hues and minimal, if ambiguous, planar relationships might suggest naiveté; but here the charged colors invite us to find more subtle formal links among the elements of the composition. Thorne deploys stark, if not unsettling, eruptions of both hot and cold colors in a

single space. The juxtaposition excites, because we cannot be certain if the cool colors are pushing the warm colors forward or vice versa—a surprising reversal of tonal convention.

On the whole, Thorne's colors seem to produce their own light, and each layer is independent. While a painting like *Tatua* (2008) achieves remarkable unity among its many temperatures and textures, *Jarabaco* (2010) challenges both perception and interpretation. It is divided into three dominant spatial areas and four layers of texture. Two sharp rose triangles emerge from the left edge, a larger purple-indigo area controls the center, and another edge-hugging light blue section emerges from the right, bounded by a strong, yellow-green zigzag stripe that crosses into the purple area at the very top edge of the canvas. These hard-edged shapes support the fainter brushstrokes within them: tightly woven bands of rose, red and pink in the red section; larger circular swirls in the center section overlaid with warm, vivid orange rings fluctuating and rising from the lowest edge of the canvas; shorter, thicker strokes in the small edge-hugging blue area on the right.

Also in the painting's center are two floating motifs—two blue-green blocks above and, at the bottom of the canvas, a set of five inverted V-shapes almost invisible against their purple ground. This center area holds the four, distinct layers that epitomize the strongest appeal of these works: depth without illusionism.

—Douglas Manson