

Art in America

Dusty Boynton at Littlejohn/Sternau - New York, New York - Review of Exhibitions

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The recent paintings of Dusty Boynton are accretions of small incidents that together add up to luminous, richly textured expanses. In a show superficially reminiscent of MOMA's recent Ryman retrospective, Boynton exhibited mostly white or off-white canvases, though her layering of rice-paper and acrylic paint gives her works a deeper (albeit still shallow) space than his. Rather than the defining brushstroke, Boynton uses pencil or charcoal, or she scratches into the paint to record a sequence of intimate gestures. The thin layers, alternating between transparency and opacity, take the eye in and out of the picture's surface. Her slow process yields paintings that verge on the obsessive, but the total effect of quietude justifies their methodical construction.

Boynton's work has gone through a transformation over the past few years, shifting from a naive figuration described by reviewers as childlike to a contemplative, discreet abstraction. In the interim, she produced a body of works on paper that incorporate patterns of hand-stamped and hand-colored images such as fruit, often combined with magazine illustrations or sheets of old ledger paper.

In her current paintings, Boynton eschews clearly identifiable images. In *Poultice*, one of three large (62 by 100 inches) 1993 paintings exhibited, Boynton applied long, horizontal bands of paper over other sections of paper and paint to suggest a view, through translucent venetian blinds, of a warm, bleached landscape. The other layers are not so much hidden as they are held gently in place, giving particular resonance to the work's title, a kind of home remedy for minor ailments (a "hot, moist mass of flour, mustard, etc.," according to Webster's).

Submission is divided into nearly equal sections of 8-by-10-inch paper, alternately white and linen-colored. Lined up across the elongated checkerboard are tiny rows of stark white rice-paper segments, each less than an inch in length. In this painting, which evokes ancient decorative walls, the handmade aspect prevents the repeating elements from becoming static and offers a soothing rhythm and textural complexity.

The graphite scribbles that punctuate the surface of *Listener* are tiny bundles of imploding energy. They are indecipherable notations, small events that are arranged in seemingly arbitrary but orderly rows of collaged paper on a pale peach-colored ground. Boynton has tapped into an Eastern, Cagean simplicity that offers many unexpected levels of pleasure.