

In Tension (Divided Intentions)

Great cities are invigorating theaters; stage sets for life's comedies and tragedies. Navigating them requires strategic maneuvers and studied indifference to keep the action moving without disrupting the flow. Gestures communicate intention; glances convey acknowledgement. Encounters can be fraught when the choreography falters, where one is caught staring or bodies in uncomfortable proximity suddenly collide. Space is always at a premium, and invasions of it are often met with icy disdain.

A few things we are told concretely about Allison Malinsky's recent paintings: they are metropolitan creations sparked by Barcelona energy. Warm tones evoke flesh, cool ones, shadow. Bodily associations are deliberate, sensual responses desired. There is no single viewpoint. Movement is implicit, in the works themselves, and our engagement with them. In microcosm they reproduce an urban experience of encounters, of bodies in tension.

These are hints at artistic intention, within the formal experiment of reimagining the relation between illusionistically depicting and literally constructing mass and volume. The painter demands three dimensions to conjure the erotics of depth beneath the refined surface. So she builds.

In their flat form on the shaped pattern the artist designed, there are indications of mounds and crevices, places of entry or invitations to squeeze or to caress. These are illusions created with color modulation, shading, and contour, and you will never see them. Or touch them. But you can imagine their pliability, their give, their slip and stick, the somatic sensation of folding and fixing them into their current form. So envy the artist the exclusive right to manipulate them into the objects you see.

The suave surfaces seduce. A cursory glance will identify clean lines and subtle shading. Beguiling shapes cling to the walls, thwarting our ability to distinguish painting from sculpture, or abstraction from figuration. Tensile counterbalance in the invisible architecture (the artist's own engineering ingenuity) creates the bending, torqueing forms, wrinkle-free but not free of fissures.

They are distinctly object-like, coolly closed off. Then, they are overlapping limbs. The perfect pike of a springboard diver. A dancer's elegant limbs. Your heart's desire. There can be no right way to see, but to fully engage with this corpus of work requires haptic commitment. The body, our body, must be brought to the task of sliding past the hard-edges to slip into the cracks. Be absorbed. Go inside. Take the plunge.

The next time you engage in an intimate tangle or rub up against a stranger, you may find yourself divided, between the aestheticized surface and the unplumbed depths. Take yourself back to Malinsky's work, to its assured wholeness peppered with peculiarities, the oh-too-human tension between how we look, and how we feel.

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