

rachel uffner

ART IN NEW YORK

Monday, May 11, 2009

Hilary Harnischfeger at Rachel Uffner Gallery

Hilary Harnischfeger's works are not paintings, plaster sculptures, or works on paper--but maybe they are all of these put together. Each work in her second solo show in New York is heavy with all these materials and more. One has the sense that her wall works have traveled a long way to get here, having survived Harnischfeger's process: the artist dips thick layers of paper in water and ink, then hardens them with plaster. But the real work has yet to begin. The congealed and hardened layers of paper are then beautifully painted and drawn upon. You will often find chunks of quartz or shards of crystal embedded beyond her surfaces. While she might as well have left the gemstones at home, Harnischfeger's explorations of the many possibilities of these surfaces lend her work a sense of completeness; their refusal to be categorized is only the beginning of their mysterious character.

Her process seems to marry pointed visual decisions with happenstance, namely her initial lack of knowledge as to exactly what shapes and colors her layered paper surfaces will take after they are dipped and hardened. Despite the visible evidence of a rigorous process, works like *Mantle* (2009) do not seem fussy. The equal evidence of chance and the work's clashing textures surpass that label. Rather, *Mantle* looks as though it has been aggressively dug through during a quest for the deepest and most colorful layer, where subdued blues, greens and pinks smolder beneath the black surface. Steps of layered pages are echoed by similar strata drawn on single layers, like the rings of a tree trunk. In a way, her



Hilary Harnischfeger. 'Untitled,' 2009



Hilary Harnischfeger. 'Mantle,' 2009

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painterly works feel more like solid, concentrated objects than paintings, which occupy only two dimensions. The artist has painted every visible point of these wall-pieces, so that the mystery continues from every angle.

In a freestanding sculpture titled Lucy (2009), it is difficult to tell where one layer ends and the next begins. As with her paintings, the small patches bursting with pastel colors could either be the deepest layer, peering out from beneath the plaster exterior, or the most immediate layer, momentarily adorning the otherwise monotone surface. As such, Harnischfeger's work keeps us guessing.

Through June 21st.

Posted by Alexander Wolf at 8:43 PM