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Amy Schissel: #everythingthathappensatonce

Laura Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University - Morgantown, W.V.

By Jason Hoelscher

Amy Schissel has a lot to say, show, reveal and connect in her recent exhibition, titled “#everythingthathappensatonce.” This name is apt in that, although the paintings lack the unity and right-here presentness of, for example, a monochrome, the sheer volume of visual incident and energy are so densely entwined they might as well be an inextricable mass of everything happening all at once. Like a screen of shifting, effervescent static in other words, individual components become difficult to disentangle and see at a unit-by-unit level and operate more like a solid surface releasing latent potential.

That said, an equally apt exhibition title might have been #everythinghappenshereandeverywhere. The hashtag in the title indicates an interesting agenda, particularly for such a localizable and object-based discipline as painting. The hash (#) generally precedes and tags a phrase or idea so others can find and cross-reference the wide range of social media posts or comments that mention it. Hashtags bring a disparate set of comments posted by many people, from multiple areas, into relation, and much the same can be said of Schissel's exhibition. Firstly, and most obviously, these works bring together a mesh of visual modes that range from tropes of old-school modernist abstraction and psychedelic imagery to the screen-space protocols of network flows. Many painters have played with such combinations in recent years, and Schissel does it with rare finesse, pitting tropes of modernist opticality against eye-popping color, set off within a picture space that seems flat not so much in a Greenbergian sense, but rather like layered tabs in a browser window.



Amy Schissel, #everythingthathappensatonce, installation view, 2017, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Of equal interest, however, is the implication of ideas like “everything happens at once” and “everything happens here and everywhere” in the way these paintings want centrifugally to escape the bounds of the canvas while simultaneously and centripetally being drawn back in. For example, in *Painting II*, this happens prominently on the Z axis in the way certain patches of the picture plane look like they want to recede into deep perspectival space while simultaneously being neutralized by jagged forms of cloudier and murkier brushwork, as well as by tiny zips of lateral motion that flutter back and forth across the canvas. Some works even extend the Z axis forward from the picture plane, pushing out along the floor into the space in front of the canvas.

If these paintings’ Z axes are spatially complicated, the X and Y axes are truly complex. In the way the canvases are enmeshed in a network of shapes, forms and marks, they act less as individual paintings than as an aggregate object of painterly diffusion that admirably sprawls across the wall. These forms, extending as they do so densely out and beyond the frame of the canvas, smartly suggest that the visual energy unleashed on any individual canvas itself is too much to be contained within the depicted space and needs a release valve into actual space in order to maintain coherence.

Schissel’s transgressing of the boundaries of her painted objects’ X/Y axes suggests an interesting resonance with Jacques Derrida’s notion of an artwork’s *ergon/parergon* relationship. This refers to the relationship between an artwork (*ergon*) and its framing mechanism (*parergon*), regarding where the boundary of one stops and the other begins. For example, to a painting, the frame is part of the wall, while to the wall the frame is part of the artwork. A frame, then, acts as a *parergonal* interface that mediates the relationship between two different forces, internal and external, without being part of either one. In this smart exhibition, Schissel breaks this binary down altogether, with the artwork traversing and activating both wall and object. This brings the two into a tense, open-ended series of negotiations regarding how each aspect—the slightly more diffuse paint on the walls and the more densely concentrated paint on the canvas—can work together to rev up and activate the overall context in its entirety.

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