

Amanda Church and Gregory Montreuil

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New York artists Amanda Church and Gregory Montreuil used curvilinear motifs reinforced by the image of clouds on their show invitation. Church's circular shapes boast odd bulges and fetishized edges. Montreuil's gestural loops, as emblems for the posited mark and its negative space, assume a philosophic density of form. Both artists' careful treatment of edges slows the eye to an investigative crawl and lends their work an intimacy which is offset by the visual restraint of its imagery. Within the tidy processes of repetition and accumulation each artist employs, a suburban aesthetic asserts itself. Initially, the work on view seems innocuous in its orderly tastefulness. Its aesthetic is suburban in that it is cool and controlled, calibrated to soothe those expectations it then disrupts. Here, the organizational impulse that informs the aesthetic is transformed into ruminations on the formal constructs of painting and, ultimately, how those constructs navigate the relationship between feeling and its expression.

Domesticity informs Amanda Church's shapes, which suggest potato chips, house pets and other loved, familiar forms. Church painstakingly outlines these shapes with bands of color that explode against the fields of hot melon, lemon yellow and purple in which the shapes float. The chalky surfaces of her paintings belie their chromatic intensity and reveal loving swipes of the brush at odds with their hard-edged shapes. While the shapes themselves recall the dogs and cats of

kitschy postcards and the reductive images of signage or cartoons, their articulated brushwork and vibrant color contextualize them as painting. Safely within the canon they can flirt with a psychedelic sensibility through post-pop imagery and tuned-up pastel hues. As a result they startle the eye into a new definition of painterly taste based on the incongruity between immediately digestible imagery and its richly painted evocation.

In the four paintings she presents (all 1998), Church centers her shapes on symbolic grounds in an updated version of icon painting. Rejecting icon painting's spiritual associations, Church solicits our psychological projections through the ambiguity of her images. Her images are clearly portrayed but not clearly defined, their visible paint handling truncated by the economy of their shapes. Tension is invoked through our desire for clarity of meaning and the works' inability to fulfill that desire. Self-referential titles such as *Sweet Return* and *Double Vision* reinforce the deadpan literalism that maintains the emotional distance so necessary for social discourse or contemplative thought, keeping the expressiveness of paint at bay.

Gregory Montreuil clips specialized sections from the newspaper (business, real estate, foreign languages) to use in four small collages (all 1998). The fine scale of newsprint and the delicacy of their rounded edges create an unexpectedly tender metaphor for life's transience as glimpsed in a stream of trivial detail. As our eyes skim the text in *Untitled (Obituary)*, we suddenly realize we're reading the final codas to people's lives. The realization prompts a shift in consciousness so that Montreuil's ephemeral bubbles of print become metaphorical tombs. Imperceptibly, Montreuil's dopey device of newspaper cuttings evoke a complex confrontation with the central issue of our lives.

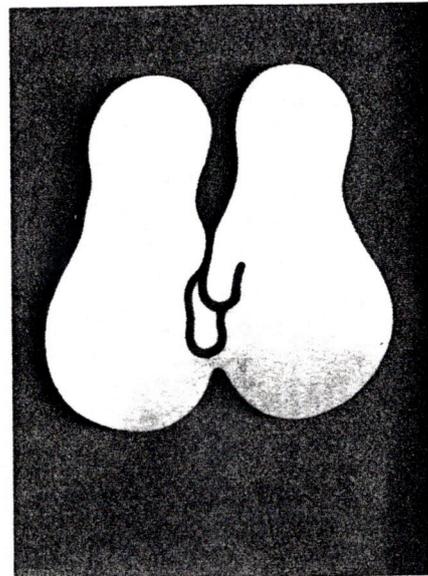
In four works he calls *Movement Within*, Montreuil explores gesture as directly and indi-

rectly applied. In *Movement Within (Nos. 18 and 7)*, the artist affixes marble pebbles to two small panels. The interstices between each piece of marble become maze-like marks which run the length and width of the panels. As such, the marks describe gesture as the byproduct of a cumulative process and negates our preconceptions of gesture as spontaneous. However, Montreuil's subtle point and cool approach is disrupted by the connotation of marble as a decorative material for the front walks and gardens of homes in suburban communities. His comment on expressiveness is subsumed in a more powerful social context.

In counterpoint, Montreuil's *Movement Within (Nos. 16 and 17)* explore gesture as it evolves within a singular and decisive moment—in the case of these works, with deliberate spontaneity. Flurries of murky green marks float on milky green grounds. Contrasted with Abstract Expressionist gestural tropes, Montreuil's lightness of touch can be construed as domesticated play, even decorative. Seen in the aftermath of that movement in painting, Montreuil's monochrome works are polite and diminutive. In their scaled-down aesthetic, his paintings question gesture as meaningful or large in scale. In his personal modifications of the language of paint Montreuil pointedly redefines gesture.

With their visual arabesques and mild eruptions of expressiveness, the works on view lull us into a receptive amiability with which we navigate its cool imagery and warm application—that is, until the smooth flow of our consumption is disrupted by the works' challenge to our emotional and visual expectations. Church and Montreuil rupture our preconceptions delicately, but effectively, in the way that a moment of truth in the midst of social ritual becomes fixed in the memory as a signal of irrevocable change.

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Amanda Church, *The High Life*, 1998, oil on canvas, 48" x 36" (photo courtesy of the artist).