

# DAILYSERVING

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## Amy Sillman: Break-up Sex

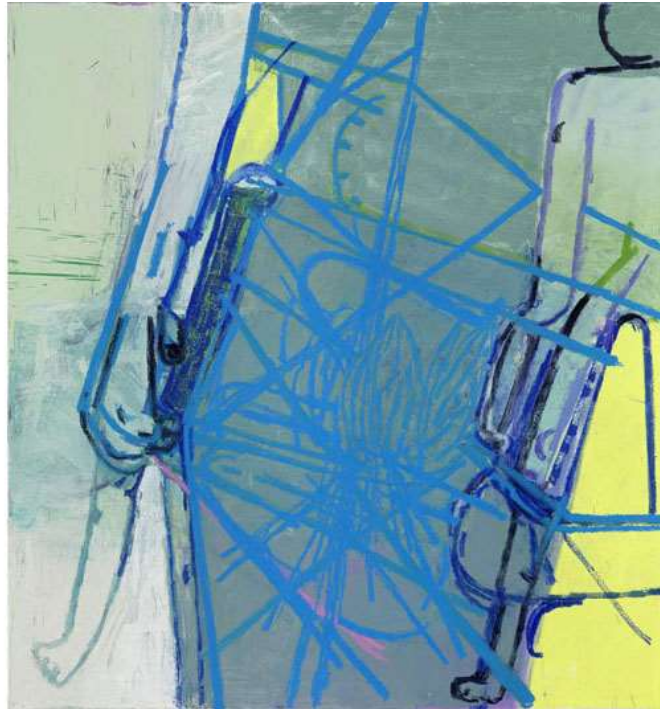
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Amy Sillman's highly publicized split from abstraction may not be quite as dramatic as she made it sound in her sassy breakup letter on Bomblog in 2009. To her credit, she was never a card-carrying member of the High Church of Abstraction anyway. I think some of the works in *Transformer (or how many lightbulbs does it take to change a painting?)*, her current show at Sikkema Jenkins & Co., are in some ways more abstract than previous efforts. But it doesn't really matter; labels are stupid.

I'm so sick of painters claiming Philip Guston as a forebear, but Sillman's mixture of confessional cartooning and dark humor, which mirrors Guston's notorious move away from abstraction in 1970, feels authentic. While Guston's figurative intention seemed to elucidate the shades-drawn reclusiveness that he saw both in his artist-self and in the hooded figures of the KKK, Sillman seems to be growing more direct and open about her revelations than he ever was.

In a powerhouse group of new drawings, which are the first thing one encounters in this fairly extensive show, body parts stretch and mash together to create awkwardly structural forms that somehow explain the humor and futility of life, sex and art making. Hung in a tight grid, these works never get morbid or didactic—things are confidently upbeat and amoral.



If sex was the elephant in the room for Sillman's 2007 show at Sikkema, then love may be lurking somewhere here. Not the mature, late-in-life-walk-on-the-beach-type love, but lurid, new love. The type of love that makes you not care what your friends think if you're a little too busy enjoying life to return their calls and texts like you did when you were single.

Some of the stuff in this show is intentionally nerdy. A second series of drawings takes a rather lengthy narrative spin around the creative process, ending with a drawing of a curlicue light bulb over what appears to be a cutesy self-portrait. A hand-scrawled note on the wall above a table of 'zines says something like 'zines \$1 (honor system)." The 'zine itself is cool, but the writing on the wall seems desperately DIY. But so what? We forgive these things of our friends who are in love. If they're happy, so are we.

In a way, this entire show could be read as an earnest attempt to explore the erotic self as it intersects with technology and sensory perception. To this end, Sillman bets the house on old-fashioned painting, looking square in the face of trend shifts and technological advances. She makes a strong case. While I've never been a fan of her adherence to old-school painting styles, with surfaces reminiscent of such un-hip practitioners as Richard Diebenkorn or Terry Winters (ack!), in these new paintings she somehow makes it all palatable. It is refreshing to see an artist not give a shit about the whole digital effect on abstraction. Plus, by now we've learned that there really isn't any one dominant medium or train of thought in painting. Pitting abstraction against representation is ultimately counterproductive. Sillman's public "breakup" with abstraction might be overstated, but the paintings are convincing enough that we don't really care.