



TEAM SHAG

Collaborative paintings by Amy Sillman, David Humphrey, and Elliott Green

2010 january 22 through february 17, clough-hanson gallery, rhodes college, memphis, tn



Lonely Dog

2004

Mixed media on paper

15" x 11"

In looking at the TEAM SHaG paintings by Amy Sillman, David Humphrey, and Elliott Green one should first consider the process of collaboration. It may help to think about an individual's studio practice like a conversation. If one is alone in the studio working on a piece, it's like talking to one's self. While a monologue might take an unexpected turn or two, generally one has some idea of where it might end. Obviously the dynamics change considerably once a conversation is opened to include other people. It could easily bounce around from today's episode of *Fresh Air* to who has the best hot wings in town, followed by who would win in a fight between a gorilla and a lion. Personalities emerge: we see the instigator, the mediator, the elaborator, the passive and the active, the one who edits or resolves. It is also a great way for one artist to get into the head of another artist to consider why an artist makes the moves he or she makes. It forces the participants to try to figure out a middle ground between differing personal aesthetics. The act of collaboration also grants permission for the artists to try out new ways of working and puts them in the rare and privileged position of making changes to paintings started by their partners. The problem-solving involved in a collaborative effort utilizes an entirely different part of the brain and requires one to bring a whole new set of image-making tools to the job. Thankfully the process can lessen the sense of individual responsibility; the fear of failure is pushed to the back burner when one can pass the work off when properly confounded. As a result, there is more risk taking. It becomes a wondrous, symbiotic, pedagogical experience where each artist learns by witnessing how the others use their own set of tricks to tackle a challenge. One also must admit that the discovery of a totally new, unexpected image can be a magical revelation. There is something wholly amazing that happens when a group struggles as a team to pull an image together.

The logistics of TEAM SHaG's process is simple enough. Each artist starts in his or her own studio with an even number of canvases. For example, Green starts out with six surfaces; once he starts the ball rolling, he passes three surfaces off to Humphrey and three surfaces off to Sillman and so on. Once the paintings have been passed to all three members and reach a certain critical mass, TEAM SHaG meets to discuss the status of the paintings. If adjustments need to be made they are discussed and finished on the spot. The collaborations grew out of a desire for the friends to keep in touch and to maintain a kind of studio connection. The show at Clough-Hanson Gallery is a selection of work that includes their earliest efforts from 1997 through the most recent works on paper from 2006. Through this exhibition the viewer sees not only the artists becoming more skilled in their collaborative endeavors, but we are also able to see these extraordinary artists' personal language develop and mature. In the earliest pieces we see the individual voices of the artists, each one particular and distinct. In the earlier efforts, the viewer familiar with the independent

work of Sillman, Humphrey, and Green can take pleasure in discerning who made what move when. And while these constructions are as coherent as they are dissonant, it is interesting to note that one finds an altogether new, fourth hand emerge in the most recent works on paper. It is almost as if the need to make signature marks was set aside or lost entirely as we see marks that appear to be executed by a singular, unified hand.

The TEAM SHaG paintings function like a really great Pixies song in that on the whole both are at first challenging and neither is really recommended for the timid or faint of heart. David Humphrey describes the paintings by writing that "the mind of these paintings is singular and clusterfucked, splendid and demented."¹ At first the viewer is thrown off guard by paintings filled with jarring juxtapositions of images, dramatic shifts in speed, as well as some seriously disturbing color choices. This awkwardness is pushed further when these brutal, bombastic elements are paired with the delicate, carefully considered moments in this series of striking yet tough paintings. In the same vein, TEAM SHaG's paintings also accomplish the very difficult task of finding a sweet harmony embedded deep within a chaotic tangle of images and methods. TEAM SHaG's working method allows the viewer to see the process unfold. In *Things I Wonder* one sees a violent, mighty-brush blast of olive green come in from the top and almost obliterate the delicate, monochromatic rendering of a woman holding a baton and a bouquet of flowers. *Copper & Iron* shows an embracing couple caught just before (or after) a kiss, surrounded on all sides by a thicket of painterly, structured abstraction overlapped with layers of miscellaneous body parts and geometric shapes. In other paintings we see flat, graphic sections carefully rein in goeey passages of delicious paint while thin washes push intricately modulated areas to the rear of the picture plane. The paintings are juicy with the struggle that happens between the urge to block out territory and augment the earlier moves of a teammate.

It would be simple-minded to think of the paintings in this show as a kind of side project of these three exceptional artists. I argue that TEAM SHaG's nearly decade-long experience should be seen as a focused learning laboratory of sorts for the artists, and more importantly these paintings function as a concrete preservation of a particular moment in time within the scope of these artists' social and professional lives. A moment where three established artists came together and relinquished a little control in an effort to learn more about each other and themselves.

Hamlett Dobbins
Director, Clough-Hanson Gallery

¹ David Humphrey, "Amy Sillman II," *Blind Handshake* (New York: Periscope Publishing, 2009) 35.



Fed All But
2004
Oil on canvas
64" x 46"



Things I Wonder

1997

Mixed media on canvas

31.25" x 24"



Copper & Iron, 2004, Oil on canvas, 44" x 61"



Rhodes College
—1848—

Clough-Hanson Gallery | 2000 North Parkway, Memphis, TN, 38112 | 901.843.3442 | rhodes.edu/gallery

Cover Image: *Swing*, 2004, Oil on canvas, 45" x 62"
All images courtesy Amy Sillman, David Humphrey, and Elliott Green