DIANNA FRID: WORKS ON PAPER 2008 - 2010

2010 september 17 through october 15, clough-hanson gallery, rhodes college, memphis, tn
This Page: Dislocation of Snow, 2008 / Mixed media on paper / 12 x 9 inches / Collection of Marilyn and Larry Fields, Chicago.

Cover Image: The Breaking of a Bubble is a Worthy Study / 2009 / Mixed media on paper / 79 x 96 inches / Courtesy of the artist and devening projects + editions, Chicago.
The works on paper included in Dianna Frid’s show at the Clough-Hanson Gallery highlight a particular segment of the artist’s work, which also includes installations, sculptures and artist’s books. A main current running through all of Frid’s work is the re-imagining of natural phenomena. In writing about the work art historian Lori Waxman invokes a word used by the Ancient Greeks, aporia, to describe the way Frid’s work strives to capture the “amazement that can be felt before the confusing puzzles of the universe.” It is here, in the drive to examine the arrests caused by wonderment that we find the heart of Frid’s extraordinary practice.

In considering Frid’s work it may be helpful to understand that she was born and lived in Mexico City until her adolescence, when she moved with her family to Vancouver, Canada. Eventually she went to study and live in the United States. After some time in New York, she settled in Chicago where she has lived since 1999. These geographic and cultural shifts have inflected her practice with what the artist describes as a “release from the shorthand of the regional and the rooted.” While her work is informed by myriad sources and experiences, it gives the impression of being drawn from the micro and the macroscopic, coming from everywhere at once. Titles of works such as The Breaking of a Bubble Is a Worthy Study, Light Visible to the Eyes of Man, and What We Often Simply Call Air provide us with a glimpse of the artist’s propensity to draw inspiration from literary genres as well as from the scientific realm.

The viewer quickly realizes that the two-dimensional works in the gallery are not strictly paintings per se. These are built images, and the process of how these works on paper are built is also evident in her sculptures and artist books. Sheets of foil, cloth, and painted paper are used as found or they are cut into basic units such as triangles, circles, and rectangles. Gradually, through accretion, they come together to create larger, more complex forms. The cadenced application of materials recalls the techniques used in the disciplined construction of tiled mosaics, but they also point to the irregular, distressed qualities of vernacular American quilts.

Varying levels of harmony and discord emerge from these concretions. These accumulations are often formations reached after a series of responses stemming from a basic beginning: combining two things and then adding more, taking away, and burying with something new. There is an attribute of play in the way Frid uses process to produce and collapse structures that teeter between recognizable and elusive configurations. The crude nature of the cuts and irregular shapes infuses the works with a Philip Guston-esque sense of urgency and immediacy. The deliberate nature of the process provides a structural and formal sturdiness that makes the sometimes-delicate constructions feel as though they could withstand the rough handling of the real world. The artist’s imperfect grids and hand-wrought geometry allow the work to be understood not as a scientific theorem that can be proved or disproved, but rather as objects that have been coaxed into being by fusing intuition and logic, knowing and un-knowing.

Most of the works on paper feature a central figure or subject floating in the center of a ground. In her essay for the catalog of Remote Viewing, the art historian Katy Siegel writes that a “central composition implies a human presence, a maker, someone who generates not neutral, all-over fields but worlds with perspectives, hierarchies, and values.” In the case of Dianna Frid’s work materials do not simply point to an understanding of phenomena, but they are used to forge a path, to find new approaches to describe and thus experience the ways the universe manifests itself. Frid’s position is not simply one of an observer. She takes an active hand in the process of how perception is received, further recreated and deployed once more.

Hamlett Dobbins, Director, Clough-Hanson Gallery

2. From a conversation with the artist, Chicago, September 10, 2010.