

ALEXANDRE

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Nature, Reduced But Full: Lois Dodd at Alexandre Gallery

by John Goodrich

Lois Dodd: Recent Paintings at Alexandre Gallery

January 23 to March 1, 2014

41 East 57th Street at Madison Avenue

(The Fuller Building, 13th Floor)

New York City, 212-755-2828



Lois Dodd, Barn and Bean Vines, 2013. Oil on panel, 15-3/4 x 18-1/4 inches. Courtesy of Alexandre Gallery

Something mysterious happens when a painter commits impressions of nature to canvas. Even though the act of painting involves reductions—simplifications of form, omissions of detail—expressiveness is liable to expand. For an artist liberated by this re-ordering (and the best are), a richness of vision supplants the sheer plenitude of nature. Lois Dodd is clearly such an artist, and her latest paintings at Alexandre shows that even after six decades of exhibiting she hasn't missed a step.

The thirty, mostly small paintings of houses, landscapes and flowers reflect her familiar, idiosyncratic outlook: the probing, often mischievous curiosity about the appearance of ordinary objects, and the peculiarities of translating them to a flat surface. As always, Dodd hides none of her process, rendering masses in broad planes that serve as foils for agile, darting detail.

In March Snow (2013), the artist captures the minimalist scene of a neighbor's dormer window—glimpsed, apparently, from her own second-story window—with confident color and an appealing lack of decorum. The pale, dense yellow of the facade gives way to a slightly more neutral—but somehow vastly open—yellow of sky. Nature elaborates on this pas de deux, and Dodd relates: scraggly branches reach upwards beyond the house, while snowflakes filter downwards in the space between it and our point of view. Red Shirt and Window (2013) relishes the sight of a clothesline-suspended shirt, scrawny but exuberant, against the great, mounding arc of a bush.



Lois Dodd, Red Shirt and Window, 2013. Oil on panel, 15-3/4 x 16 inches. Courtesy of Alexandre Gallery

Riddles of details punctuate the unfolding prose of Window with Amaryllis Plant (2012). A slender, green stalk winds sinuously in front of a house's austere verticals. A conversation circulates between a window sash lock, the house's chimney, and a twist of yellow-green in the flowerpot—all equal in dimensions on the surface, but thoroughly apart in space.

The exhibition includes nearly a dozen close-up paintings of flowers—floral portraits, really. In some of these, an evenness of color imparts a handsome, if not particularly urgent, graphic effect. More compelling is Bishop's Children & Monarch Butterfly (2007), in which the variety and density of color impart a dramatic depth; the uppermost blossom hovers with vivacious breadth.

In fact, it's the paintings with the densest designs and colors that reward the most. These include Foxglove and Wheelbarrow (2006), in which broad swathes of green—of various temperatures, and lightened in places by thinned brushstrokes—silhouette a wheelbarrow's crisp, shadowed forms. It holds midway between a foreground blossom—close enough to touch—and a sky that hangs distantly despite its patchy texture of steely grays. In Barn and Bean Vines (2013), a far-away building, resting among small eruptions of trees, is dominated by the fantastically sculpturesque column of a bean vine in the foreground. With these paintings, Dodd is in her element, shaping complex rhythms with playful ease. They exude an affection for nature that never resorts to sentiment, and an occasional archness that never descends to the merely coy.

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