

# ALEXANDRE

## Two Ways of Seeing: Patricia Treib and Lois Dodd

Hunter Braithwaite

Patricia Treib and Lois Dodd paint with similar mandates—a tight focus, a luminous palette run through with reminders of the medium’s materiality, and, importantly, a time limit. The paintings are done in a single sitting. Beyond these preconditions of their making, the works share a fascination with the minutiae of the external world. Sometimes bolted down, sometimes shifting, the perceptive qualities on display reveal much of how it feels to move through time and life at once. For this spring’s Independent, Alexandre Gallery presents a contrapuntal selection of these two practices, one which revels in the complexities, and simple pleasures, of looking closely.

In her Brooklyn studio, Patricia Treib begins by revisiting the same objects as source material: an antique clock, displayed under a bell jar to reveal its gears; a vintage *Vogue* sewing envelope; a pencil cactus; a handful of stones gathered on a beach in Spain. Abstracted past the point of easy identification, these objects determine the compositions of two sets of works: the small paintings on display here, and then much larger versions, usually ten times the size, which are painted with the small works as guide. While these small works on paper are a midpoint between the source material and the larger paintings, they are not preparatory sketches, but rather an essential intermediary. These miniature paintings become anchors; once complete, Treib puts the source material away and refers only to them as she creates the larger works—creating different variations and iterations until she feels she has fully explored the original composition.

If presented with what we’re looking at (clock, plant, sleeve), viewers might experience a hint of recognition. But for the most part Treib sidesteps questions of representation. Instead, her project estranges the process of perception—the interplay of eye, brain, memory. Painted with thinned pigment lusciously applied with choreographed strokes, the compositions seem both gracefully assured and impossibly delicate. Their subjects have a liquid quality, as if only held in place by the forces of time and focus. Treib increases this effect by paying special attention to the spaces in-between. This intermediary space (it’s not quite fair to call it negative) takes on a protean, gelatinous ability to both retain, and determine, the impressions of the thing itself.

As for her colors, Treib pulls them from elsewhere, arranges them in a way where dissonance gives way to an uneasy melody. Her particularly toned grounds bring another set of emotions to the works. Warm or cool, the works radiate with luminosity. When rendered at this handheld scale, they become icons of perception.

Treib thinks of them as scores—one of the many connections between her painting and other art forms, music in particular. Her titles, which often include the words *interlude* and *variation*, hint further at the musicality of these works. Moving beyond metaphor, two main elements unite Treib’s painting and music: experience, and duration. Her paintings have an extraordinary first-hand quality. Their opticality is unprocessed: raw vision before it settles into what we’ve seen before. What is perhaps more important—this first-hand quality stretches for the duration of our time spent looking. Treib has said that a sense of time is one of the most important elements to her. These paintings are about spending time with objects, about attempts at seeing, about the shortcomings, and ultimate rewards, of concentration.

In order to fully embrace the implications of this focus, Treib paints these works in a single, uninterrupted sitting. This is less about changes in the subject matter (as if she were painting en plein air) than in mental

weather. If part of the process is about concentrated focus, then to turn away is a disservice. While you could get back into a state of focus, it wouldn't be *the same state*. This delicate urgency is passed along to the viewer. One of these paintings' gifts: the knowledge that immediacy isn't a static quality; each moment of immediacy is utterly unique, and to learn to live in the present requires constant attention.

For seventy years, Lois Dodd has been constructing one of the most legendary practices in American painting—one moment at a time. Here, she presents a selection from her *Flashing* paintings. Named after aluminum step flashing, a building material used to waterproof roofs, these works are painted on five-by-seven aluminum tiles that Dodd sands and then gessoes. The surfaces are unobtrusive: light and portable. They can easily be transported to the field, where she paints, and when viewed on the wall seem to dissolve, leaving the image floating like an apparition. In fact, the most substantial thing about this material might be its name: how *flashing* evokes a brief burst of light, a momentary optic intrusion that disorients before leading to visual revelation.

Dodd paints her surroundings—sometimes architectural, usually natural, and not far from her homes near the Delaware Water Gap and Cushing, Maine, where she has lived since the 1960s, a few miles down the road from the house and prickly field where Andrew Wyeth painted *Christina's World*. Over the years she has painted the East Village, where she was part of the Tenth Street scene. The paintings on display here, however, are all from Cushing, where she lives in the summer. They're summer paintings—paintings of flowers, of greenery, of light and breezy heat, fleeting and timeless.

It used to be that she would get in her car and drive until she found a place to paint. Recently, however, she's taken to painting her immediate surroundings, either outside, or sitting in the sunroom, looking through windows. Though they possess a happened-upon ease, Dodd's paintings are rigorously composed. She never adjusts what she finds into a more suitable composition. As she puts it, she spent enough time arranging still lifes back at Brooklyn College, where she taught from 1971 to 1992. Instead, she searches for subjects with a natural composition—a twist of a flower stem, a gridded window, a shadow passing across a cluster of buildings. She makes no preparatory drawings and paints quickly, completing the works in a single sitting.

In each, scrubbed swaths of oil paint bear the bristle marks of Dodd's brush. The short strokes build geometrically, framing the stems and petals of her floral subjects, and providing a natural architecture for the light that flows throughout. Though the result of a career spent looking slowly, they exist in the viewer as a burst of recognition, a flashbulb fusing together a perceptive hunch and the remembered afterimage. Between these two poles hangs the named world, like laundry drying on the line.

Inseparable from these views is Dodd's perspective. By following the sightlines of her closely cropped, deliberately framed compositions beyond the frame, we imagine her position. And in doing so, we consider her relationship to the subject matter, how it is quite literally changing before her eyes (and before ours). Dodd says that she returns to the same subjects again and again to see how they change. Yet inverted in this dynamism is how the observer changes. Dodd, on the urgency of this project: "if you don't grab it when you see it, it may never be that way again." And neither will any of us. In this, Lois Dodd and Patricia Treib present painting as machine for immediacy—an instrument capable of slowing time, hastening it, and recalibrating our relationship to the surrounding world, if only slightly, and only if we're paying attention.

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