

BROOKLYN
EXPOSED

Sharon Butler, Joy Curtis, and Cathy Nan Quinlan “On Display”

By Emmy Thelander

August 16, 2010

Bright geometry fills the stretch of bending white walls at Storefront, a small gallery in Bushwick that opened this year. The show, *On Display*, features the works of Sharon Butler, Cathy Nan Quinlan, and Joy Curtis.

The works are a funny match. While in some ways the trio seems like they were born for each other, the tasteful arrangement of the works masks how different they actually are.

Sharon Butler's paintings hold on to Modernist traditions. They have the weight of early Abstractionists, like Arthur Dove. They also have the soft hand of Agnes Martin and a color palette borrowed from an elementary school classroom. The paintings use the same elements: patched together blocks of primary and secondary colored shapes, networks of lines that suggest structure but don't add up to any, and one dominating, flatly colored shape.

In “BCS 5” (“Brightly Colored Separates” series) a khaki green hexagon peers in from the left perimeter. It is pushed back by a cluster of inky, dissolving bars. All the shapes float in an ethereal wash of the same khaki green, which is reminiscent of being in the womb.

All in all, Butler's paintings appear as illustrations for a sad and strange children's book, illustrating the complexity of a child's emotional make-up. They exude a sense of isolation. The separate components want to interact but are held back by insecurity. The paintings feel genuine, which is refreshing, but they lack a specificity to ground them in contemporary life.

Cathy Nan Quinlan's paintings share the isolation and mood of Butler's, but have a foot grounded in observational reality. The paintings on view come from “The Morandi Series” in which Quinlan re-imagines Morandi still-lives using a cross-hatch pattern. The sim-

plicity of the cross-hatch seems to say, “Hold on, Morandi, things aren't quite so hard. Let's relax a little.” In fact, Quinlan's paintings seem to suggest that Morandi's still-lives in and of themselves are not so grey.

In “The Outsider” one form, presumably an egg, sits on a table surface adjacent to a grey bowl with two eggs inside. The background is a diagonal grid of purple and green. The forms are merely suggested, not articulated, and the eggs, rather than being solid bodies, appear like transparent force fields. The forms shimmer around the outside of reality, refusing to coalesce.

While Quinlan and Butler's paintings are enjoyable in their own rights, Joy Curtis' sculptures are the stars of the show. They relate strongly to Donald Judd's “100 Untitled Works in mill aluminum” from 1982-1986 installed at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas. Judd's installation which fills two remodeled artillery sheds, is a game of reflection that deceives the solid material each of the untitled works is made of.

Curtis' sculptures are actually transparent, while Judd's gives the impression of being so. Her Plexiglas forms, however, confuse the distinction between transparency and reflection as Judd's do, using both transparent and reflective materials. The pieces divorce themselves from Minimalist works by incorporating patterns applied with a sardonic hand. *Amphibiology C*, a stubby polygonal form, made of transparent and mirrored plexi, incorporates a pattern of epoxy dots and a printed lacework in gold on one of the mirrored surfaces. Curtis' forms, like the eggs in Quinlan's paintings and the wobbly shapes in Butler's, become animated. They are awkward beings, immobile themselves, and “on display” for reasons they can not determine, a little like polar bears at the zoo. They appear like misfits because they are made of

KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY

87 Franklin Street, New York, NY 10013
Tel 212-777-7756 www.klausgallery.com

nothing spectacular. In fact, they were practically designed to camouflage with the pre-fabricated tiling of the gallery floor. The pieces ask: “why are we different from the floor at all?” But they have a grace they can not help, and they are modest because, frankly, they deserve to be showcased by themselves.

On Display is available for viewing through August 22nd, but for those who miss it, a nicely printed catalog with images and essays will be available for \$5. And while all the other galleries have been on vacation for August, Storefront remains active. As far as Brooklyn galleries go, Storefront is worth keeping an eye on. They have a unique selection of work with a couple top-quality artists.