

Paintings That Feel Like an Eerily Helpful Tarot Reading

by Sarah Hotchkiss



Pamela Jorden's show *Forest* is full of diptychs, but not the kind of diptychs we're used to. We'd typically picture two rectangular canvases of equal size hung snugly beside each other, like San Francisco houses and their zero lot lines. Or, in an art historical context, an altarpiece with two hinged sides. But in truth, "diptych" simply means "a work made up of two matching parts." And in Jorden's hands, how they those parts match—or fit together—is by no means typical.

Forest fills Romer Young Gallery with big stretched linen shapes and big swatches of color. It's the Los Angeles artist's fifth

solo exhibition with the gallery, and she knows exactly how to use the space. Jorden's six diptychs reject 90-degree angles for bisected circles, elegant curves and mirror-like ovals. The one rectangular canvas, *Vine*, is actually two tall and slim pieces that fit together like a satisfying puzzle, muted gray on the left, a saturated blend from yellow to cobalt on the right, a sinuous curve running between.

Even when Jorden's acrylic and oil paintings comprise two equal parts, as in the circular *Dusking* and mirror-like *Stone*, they transcend their binary nature. Vibrant colors spill across surfaces and



spaces between thin layers of paint. The soft, possibly still-mutable nature of her compositions meets the precise edges of stretched shapes, some of which are completely unexpected. Tine is like two air-filled sails, Bow an abstract rendering of its titular object. Of all the artists who have worked with shaped canvases, I was reminded most of Harvey Quaytman, who dammed up the edges of his pigmented surfaces with barriers of aluminum tape, as if the paintings struggled against containment.

If there are strict delineations in *Forest*, they come not from the compare-contrast of two opposite canvases, but like Quaytman's work, from the world within Jordan's paintings and the world outside her paintings. (Even the negative space of a crescent created by the two parts of *Moons* can be incorporated into the whole.)

If this all sounds a little woo-woo, it's because *Forest* had a semi-mystical effect on me, like getting an eerily helpful tarot reading when you don't really believe in tarot readings. How can something seemingly random feel so true? *Forest* appears to embrace elements of chance: drips and leaks, rivulets of intense color that mingle as they wish. But that chance, those

supposed accidents, are bound in by defined shapes, the linen cut precisely to fit around concave curves. And there's no way to ignore Jordan's own hand in the selection of rich colors, the placement of certain marks and all the tiny decisions that go into making a complicated, dense painting look so effortless and just right.

Ultimately, the combination of paint and shape in *Forest* creates a viewing experience akin to a controlled release: a moment in which you can let go completely, knowing all the while that you are perfectly cared for and perfectly safe.

