

REVIEWS LONDON

Patricia Treib

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By Sherman Sam



Patricia Treib, *Batignolles*, 2015, oil on canvas, 72 × 54".

At first glance, the ease with which the eye travels through one of Patricia Treib's paintings belies the complexity she brings to the canvas. The seven large paintings and three smaller works in this New York-based artist's exhibition "Mobile Sleeve" mostly feature forms created from large painterly marks that appear to have been made in a single gesture with very thin oil paint. With their flat, slightly bubbly surfaces, they resemble marks made in watercolor or ink. And yet those fluid gestures—in bright, soft color—often suggest solid volumes: architectural sections or biomorphic shapes. Still, they retain their lightness; sometimes they appear to float airily, while elsewhere they grip together like organs held firm by skin.

For example, *Batignolles* (all works cited, 2015) consists of seven stacked shapes fitting snugly into the rectangle. Along the left side stands an architecture of eight calligraphic touches, which together evoke, in outline, a large bent figure that eclipses or shelters six other forms. Next to this is a three-part pale-green arabesque, joined at top and bottom with a line; painted on its middle curves are a diamond and several drop-like forms that resemble the sound holes in a stringed instrument or a fragment of embroidery. These particular marks are among the few hints at any sort of descriptive detail on each shape. At the visual center of the composition sits a squat, serrated, curvy form of deep, warm blue stacked above a flat green pie shape that, like a plinth, appears to support it. A smooth pale-blue curve at the top-right corner recalls a curtain, suggesting that one corner visually continues beyond the rectangle. The even margin of off-white-painted canvas at the bottom of the picture creates the impression of a ground plane, enhancing the grouping's stacked quality. The work's pale colors evoke a 1950s aesthetic, while its title is the name of a Parisian suburb. Could the shapes be suggesting statuary in a French garden? Or might the work's title be a sly reference to Manet, who lived there, and whose circle of friends was known as the *groupe des Batignolles*?

Though they are not apparent referents in the work, Treib’s source material, according to the press release, includes the contours of a camera, the outline of a sleeve from a painting by Piero della Francesca, and a hand from an early-fifteenth-century Russian icon. It is the act of translating these various found motifs into twirling abstract forms, flat shapes, and curvy silhouettes through gesture and color that constitutes the basis of Treib’s art. Sometimes she returns to her inspirations; hence, *Delft Icon* is similar to *Batignolles*, although the result feels neither serial nor repetitive. One thinks instead of jazz, with its improvisations on well-known “standards.” Changes in color and in the viscosity of paint as well as variations in form and scale result in disparities in both mood and the speed with which one’s gaze traverses Treib’s works. The pleasure in her paintings resides in what Hubert Damisch describes as the “trickery of the picture”—the play between the painting’s physical nature as object and its idea. That is the duplicity with which Treib plays: from slippery paint to suggestive form.

—*Sherman Sam*