

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS GLITTER

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Let's face it. The truth is ugly and it never really had a choice in the matter. That is why the truth requires disclosure, why it is always inside. It's ugly. Contrary to popular opinion which holds that the truth is the product of purity or a logic that flaunts as fact the irreducible parts of a more complex and frightening whole, the truth is actually a nonsensical and volatile mixture whose color is most certainly brown, a nauseating brown. Brown is a manifesto whose opening line reads I am the ugly truth, the boring truth. I am beige concentrate.

Rebecca Morris is down with brown. She uses it to construct a dirty purity, a purity that looks better for the wear it received during its journey full circle from avant-garde to kitsch and back again. In fact, at the current rate of historical change, you don't have to wait for the avant-garde to become kitsch. The cycle has become so short that it's better to assume you've been beaten to the punch and proceed from there. Rebecca's art is the kind of stuff you think you need a supermarket coupon to look at, let alone buy. Her paintings are a clear reminder that in the end, for better or worse, Hamburger Helper, Manwich and Rice-O-Roni are here to stay. It's ok that modernism's ideals weren't so transcendental after all. Irony need not always be cruel the way the truth has to be ugly or even worse, boring. By now, we should be used to the fact that the feast that was once painting is somewhere in the intestinal tract of history. Stained, slathered and congealed, the fiction in Rebecca's facture is that of a catheter's view of the gastrointestinal action.

Amidst all this talk about the return of beauty, I find these paintings affirmative. They make me feel as though I could eat shit and fly. And it's safe to say that beauty won't return until it has negotiated the smell of roses with that of shit. But Rebecca's paintings are as smart as they are ugly. Style would be a lazy excuse for their dirty formalism. Instead, Rebecca's paintings propose that the category non-representational painting never existed. Abstraction was simply a brief, albeit highly cogent, construct. If it was not already the case, grid paintings, splatter and drip paintings as well as monochromes, have not only become signs for themselves but as referents they have been usurped by real life. Rebecca is just as interested in high modernist abstraction as she is in its lukewarm underside. Stripes for example, belong to Gucci just as much as they belong to Daniel Buren or a Henri Bendel shopping bag for that matter. A late Mondrian could catch Rebecca's eye just as quickly as an all too available plaid used to cover miles of cheap furniture. For Rebecca, however, it isn't a question of the reciprocity of high and low, but how genuinely close to low painting can come and still maintain its crown, a crown whose jewels have been cracked from their casings and pawned.

The previous decade could be called the decade of "bad painting." There remain, however, unexplored regions within the spectrum of "bad," one area of which might be labeled "bland painting." Some would consider the notably male bravura surrounding bad painting quite generous when compared to the lackluster spirit of bland painting. In fact, Sherrie Levine's bland paintings—the pigment averaged monochromes, the chevron backgammon paintings, and the checkerboard grid paintings—were done not only to counteract the overblown claims of abstract expressionism but also to counteract big boy badness with a badder than bad blandness. But bland paintings are engineered in the same manner as the interior of fast food restaurants, i.e. to make us leave.

Obviously we are not asked to leave in an overtly hostile manner. To the contrary, we are asked to leave through a hospitality that denies want. Unlike stores which are designed to encourage want, fast food chains deny want in that there is specifically nothing to want once you are done eating. The only thing left to want is to leave. They are interiors made up on frictionless surfaces, ones that resist being absorbent or tactile on any level. There are pictures which do not require looking and music which does not require listening. Think of those blues, those browns, those greens, those oranges, those pinks that make up most hospitably hostile interiors. Rebecca has a knack for exploiting regions of the palette to which only interior designers from the school of cruel comfort have access. There is nothing to want from Rebecca's paintings, not even the desire for good painting.

Her paintings are signifiers of a bland pleasant which modernity in its technological guise of bunny-fucking proliferation has made not only possible but desirable. Under these circumstances, bland

painting doesn't merely signify, it actually testifies to the tyranny of a sad average to which we have resigned ourselves.

Twenty Songs Less. The title of this seven-inch recording by the band Gastr del Sol announces an agenda skeptical of the culture industry's rampant production. Although one could argue that our understanding of quality and beauty have been displaced by if not dispersed across the deluge of cultural production, causing bouts of amnesia as to what is expected of a given art form, this equation ought to work in reverse. Perhaps paintings expect that we've grown comfortable with the ugly truth laid bare in Rebecca's average beauties.

Rebecca's paintings pose as bad abstractions, the way that so many bad abstractions pose for life. Her decals, glitter and kitty cats are stand-ins for beauty, the way candy and Lil Caesar's Pizza are stand-ins for food. The weight of it all is too much for her sloppy grids to bear. It's a cruel world but somebody's gotta love it. I nominate Rebecca. Twenty Songs Less!? No. Twenty paintings more.