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ARTSEEN
JACKIE SACCOCCIO: PORTRAITS

By David Rhodes



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In an excellent 2008 review in *Gay City News*, the late painter Stephen Mueller described Jackie Saccoccio as proceeding to “disrupt the picture plane either by continually contradicting space or by defining it.” In her current work, Saccoccio continues to punch holes in the picture plane, with pleasure. Hers is a visceral and intelligent play of possibilities; the color and surface is resistant, the color not melodic, the surface cracked and hard, all qualities that serve the work well.

When utilizing gravity, à la Sigmar Polke, Saccoccio pursues with energy the pictorial implications of this strategy, and she does not stop at the first interesting result, as Polke did. This was, for the latter, not a shortcoming; a pictorial interrogation of possibilities was not Polke’s thing. Yet Saccoccio continually revises her canvas by reversing its orientation, embracing the destruction of previous states with the aid of a brush, which she appears to use at some velocity. We cannot be sure of this speed—and so what?

Reading and making a painting are entirely different matters. The life of a painting after it leaves the studio is made up of the viewer's projections and reactions, a Faustian deal (the painter's, not the viewer's) that lasts for centuries. This is something newer media has yet to experience.

The psychological emphasis of the series title, *Portraits*, connects Saccoccio's new paintings to the *Interrupted Grid* series of her 2008 exhibition at Eleven Rivington. If an improvised grid can represent something of the expected regularity necessary for people to live their lives, then an interruption of the grid can be at turns painful and enlightening. Its role in Modernism is well known (and it was to this, specifically, that Saccoccio's title referred), but its ruptures are less well explored. Though her formal means have shifted since her earlier show—less brushwork in favor of floods of poured paint—Saccoccio's paintings remain just as vital.

Saccoccio's *Portraits*, abstract works that make clear an anthropomorphic intention, engage with an ongoing idea in painting. Imi Knoebel famously used this conceit for his *Grace Kelly* paintings, an entirely geometrical series begun in 1989, in which each work stands in for a face, the differences manifested through changes in color combinations. Saccoccio's paintings are such an open-ended group; enough different encounters are possible here, among the individual paintings. A consistency in making encourages comparison from one to the next, yet one feels not like the other, and they are all similar and different: this registers immediately. The subsequent question—why?—leads the viewer toward a consideration of each painting's character, from how it feels to how it is made.

Starting at the edges of each painting and beginning a track inward, via passages of broken color and disjunctive space, one observes a centered flurry of thin paint layers taking over. The perpetual motion of these relationships can be likened to the contingencies of character. If one considers effective portraiture to be more than mere resemblance (and who doesn't?), to be rather a communication through making and structure, through choices, the same expectation can be applied to abstract painting and photography. Are these paintings self-portraits in the Abstract Expressionist mold? Somehow, they are, but without the angst and uncertainty inherent in establishing a new mode of painting; cries of "this is not art" or even "this is not painting" would now seem to belong to the past. This is not to say that all anxiety is banished. Good painting is very difficult, as Carl Andre remarked when Frank Stella asked why there was so little of it in the 1960s, and this situation continues to be very much the case. Yet the current openness, despite fashionable trends, toward different modes of painting, allows artists to reclaim previous means of working. Saccoccio dialogues with abstract painting, Abstract Expressionism in particular, finding her own way without becoming derivative.