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Heidi Kidon

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Painting is both inspiration and albatross for Heidi Kidon in “Crafty Concepts leaning on Industrial Dangers,” her second solo show. Three large works are weighted by the chore of commenting on the authority of painting, and several others tinker about its framework. But in at least half of the works that make up the young artist’s pivotal exhibition, a weed takes root between the cracks of well-formulated ideas. The further Kidon lets herself go from established critiques of painting, the more inventive her pieces become.

The albatross is present in works such as *Sound Strata Skids* (2001), a large linen panel that Kidon has covered with a thick layer of varnish before attaching dozens of industrial-strength earplugs to its shiny surface. Leaning against the wall, the abstract painting also rests on a rubber antifatigue mat. The overt self-consciousness of this over-used presentational strategy is formulaic, unnecessarily rudimentary

in its emphasis on the abjection and objectification of painting. Apart from such tiresome facticity, the work’s luminous amber surface, speckled with matching earplugs, is attractive, like an abstract romantic landscape. All the more irritating is the fact that the work pretends to plug its ears to such criticism, shutting up viewers with its insistence on mute materiality.

Signs Remain Readable for 17 Years (2000–01) is equally disappointing. Seventeen small rectangles of Styrofoam packing material are installed salon style on adjoining walls in a corner of the gallery. Their geometry is accentuated with patterns of ear plugs and enamel paint in yellow, red, and blue. The primary colors call upon the history of geometric abstraction; the un-sentimental materials could be the streamlined offspring of Eva Hesse’s synthetic sculptures. It is not clear, however, how far Kidon wants to go with these associations. Neither critiques of their predecessors, nor homages that up the ante of their achievements, her small bas-relief paintings fail to take a clear stand. They come off as eco-

nomie filler, objects that simply take up space between more ambitious works.

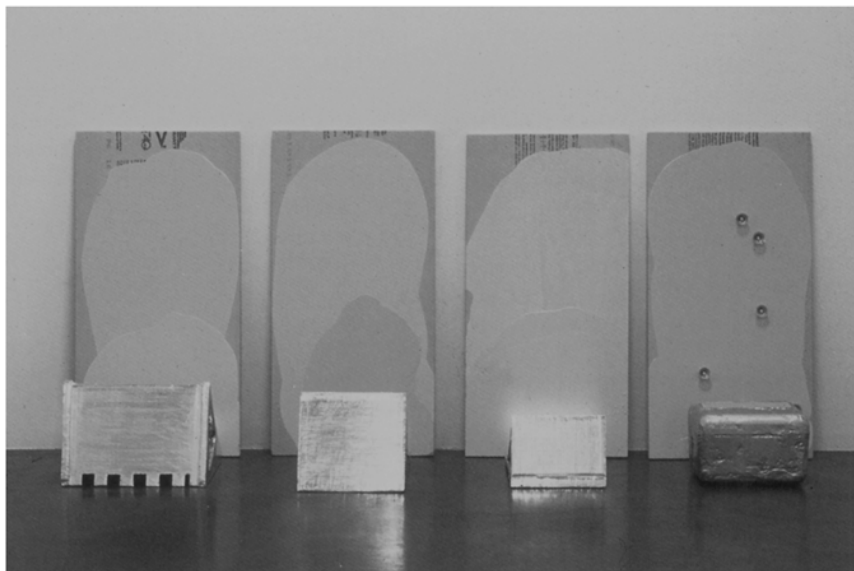
Kidon hits her stride when she lets painting be subsumed into other loves. Enter the truck. Kidon appears to love trucks, and all of the stuff about trucks. Not a single image of a truck is present, but key accessories conjure its body. From chocks to fuel filters, Kidon recreates the spirit of truck culture in fabulous colors and delicate humor. Her titles are love poems.

When it comes to thinking about trucks, Kidon finds paintings everywhere. In *Super Chocks* (2000–01), a pair of the blocks one wedges beneath a truck’s wheels to prevent it from rolling is made of cardboard and aluminum tape. The concave surfaces depict oval tread marks, lovely pinks and yellows in fields of watery black. *Fiberglass Filter* (2000–01) is a funky handmade fuel filter that looks more like a cartoon of a cow’s internal organ than anything mechanical. An aluminum frame holds a painting of the crisp folds of the filter’s face. Attached with aluminum tape to its rear are folds of spray-painted bubble wrap. Each fold is a different color. Together, they form an oddly gestural rainbow: big brown, tiny purple, mellow pink, sagging rust, nestled geranium, and translucent melon. Both works sit on the floor. Unlike *Sound Strata Skids*, however, no critical explanation comes to mind about their placement. They are simply naturals.

Likewise, *(Hot) With Graphic* (2001) occupies both wall and floor, reversing the formulaic abjection of the weaker works. A dazzlingly white polyethylene toolbox is pushed against one wall, its sleek form evoking classical architecture. Hanging just above the box’s top (on the far right) is a six-inch-square watercolor that recalls a painting by Larry Poons. Kidon’s tiny version consists of a pattern of lozenges hovering in a white field, their colors ranging from brown to yellow. Just below it, two small patches of the oval treads embossed on the box are painted similar colors. Like a minimalist Narcissus peering into a pool of plastic industrial white, Kidon’s 3-D still life evokes associations that depart in various directions.

With the truck as her invisible vehicle, the gallery becomes a stage, not for old-fashioned abjection, but for an unpretentious rebirth. Disbelief is suspended. Opportunities abound. The question shifts from “Why make a painting?” to “Why *not* make one?” Like weeds sprouting from cracks in the pavement, paintings pop up all over the place, irrepressible and tough.

Ingrid Calame is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles.



Heidi Kidon
Get Your Spill Gun, 2001
Four panels: enamel on Styrofoam with halogen projector lamps
Floor pieces: aluminum tape and enamel spray paint on cardboard
48" x 107" x 31" overall