

Protein Candy:

Allison Miller has a proclivity to set up painterly problems and turn them into wonderment. Wonderment beaming all the more brightly due to the wrenches she throws into her picture machine. She understands that problems in part define the kind of work a painter chooses to do, and are not to be avoided but embraced. Allison Miller is a painter who can make a riddle out of an answer. Problems for her are the sparkly ruby slippers... keys to another dimension.

The longer you look at Miller's paintings the better they get. They are unlike any other paintings on the planet. The more you stare at them the more they develop, change moods, come into being right before your eyes. They feel like Buster Keaton falling down a flight of stairs, a perfect cocktail of risk and control. She has a tendency to take innocuous marks, encourage them to mutate, and then suddenly they are the hallmarks of justice, the foundation of the painting's life. Blocks of color butt up against each other in a buttinsky kind of get-out-of-my-way style, like gargantuan toy blocks. Other times, thin stringy lines drift and wiggle diagonally, peter out, curl up and stew.

Do you want brush strokes to be perfect wisps of hair or epic comb overs or musical notes?

Hey look, there's an Ellsworth Kelly joke in the upper left hand corner of one painting in the form of a quotation: Kelly's unmistakable apple green and blue diagonal. But in Miller's hand, her wavering voice, Kelly is imperfect, reanimated, not hard edge. Philip Guston comes to mind, soft and blobby, a little balloony, like a cartoon.

Could there be a view of the underside of a mattress, one decorated in cake frosting, with diaristic notations of a sexual history? Things are always hiding behind other things in Miller's paintings, peeking over ledges, horizon lines jerry-rigged, undermined. Grand plans eclipsed.

Two of her canvases are bottom-heavy trapezoids. This is strange because the shape engenders a picture plane that doesn't quite make sense, exaggeratedly foreshortened, like a tennis court viewed on television. Miller's paintings are not difficult because they wish to be difficult, but because they wish to wreak some luscious brain havoc.

Her marks and gestures are amusingly self-conscious, but earnest, and ultimately moving. This reminds me of writers who can really write versus writers who perform stunts on the page as stand-ins for good sentences but they smell of the klutzy stuntman. The stuntmen pine for the grace of the authentic.

Miller is genuinely funny, something of a comedian, new school Borscht Belt. Is she a ham? Ham is a sugary tasting pink meat that comes from the center of a swine. It's like protein candy. Miller's painterly wit is deployed to unsettle the system, your system, our understanding of optical or physical reality. She makes weird decisions. Weird meaning really good. Is there a glory hole at the bottom of her painting, a strip of glued on flowery fabric that looks like baby clothes? Is it good to be torn between revelation and fertile discomfort when looking at a painting? I take that as a yes. I take the yes as a kind of drug.

— Benjamin Weissman