

MARGIE LIVINGSTON

July 24 – November, 15, 2015



APPEX



Stack of Planks, 2013; Rough-Cut Paneling Dark, 2013 and Rough-Cut Paneling Light, 2013, installation view, Luis De Jesus Los Angeles



PQFM, 2014-15

APEX: MARGIE LIVINGSTON

Seattle artist Margie Livingston makes objects out of paint, pouring gallons of acrylic to form skins, ribbons, blocks, and other shapes that she hangs on nails, drapes over pegs, leans against the wall, piles like discarded fabric, and cuts into logs. Here, paint is both the artist's material and her subject. It may be a simple abstract shape that, stretched over an armature, resembles a table or an old box spring. It may appear flesh-like to the touch, yet resemble 1960s wall paneling. In Livingston's art, the conflating of subject and medium creates seductive, visceral, and mysterious two- and three-dimensional works.

Until 2009, Margie Livingston was a painter working in the traditional medium of oil on canvas. Her subject was the natural environment, especially the structure of trees. She overlaid delicate fields of pale glowing color with linear, grid-based geometric patterns, perhaps harkening back to Piet Mondrian's foundational cubist-based tree paintings of around 1910, as well as to the grid

as an organizing principle and spiritual frame for avant-garde artists of the second half of the 20th century. However, Livingston eventually became dissatisfied with the limitations imposed by paint on canvas in terms of size, shape, and dimensionality, and she began experimenting with paint alone. For more than the last six years, paint itself has provided her main means and subject. Not without irony, underlying structural elements supporting the newer pieces echo the supporting role of stretcher bars in her earlier canvases, but working in three dimensions provides the artist an infinitely wider range of formal options. Two examples in the exhibition are *Big Grid*, 2015, and, more obliquely, *PQFM*, 2014-2015, whose structure is masked by a ruffled, organic, quilt-inspired skin, or blanket, of paint.

The runny, plastic nature of acrylic paint gives both a sense of immediacy to Livingston's objects, and lends them a haphazard, informal quality. Livingston states: "Like the organic, sensual

physicality of works by artists Lynda Benglis and Eva Hesse, my relationship with the draped paintings is physical, body to body. They exist in real space, rather than the illusional space of painting. As I must stroke the paint to shape it, it becomes so much like skin that the gesture is akin to a caress. I also play with the weight of painting, letting gravity reveal the material's flexibility so the works allow painting's historical significance to reflect back on itself." Her work is fueled by the way it is made, drawing meaning from the act of manipulating her materials into two-dimensional wall pieces, or by layering and stacking sheets of paint to form three-dimensional objects.

Process has long fascinated Livingston, whose artfully controlled approach to fabrication results in works that are obviously related and at the same time, quite different, in both appearance and, seemingly, in intent. Early in the paint-sculpting process, she spent five years limiting her palette exclusively to black, white, red, and yellow. This freed her to experiment with the material, while using the color systematically to unify disparately formed objects. Establishing rigid parameters for her process allows her to concentrate on creating the plastic material, pouring as many as 40 or 50 gallons of paint in layers, one container at a time. When dry, the paint forms a malleable sheet of varying depth, depending on the



Falling Grid with Prussian Blue and Raw Sienna, 2015



90 Color Tests, 2012

amount of paint deployed. The sheets can then be bent, draped, and folded according to the artist's will.

Inspired by historical precedents, Margie Livingston's work avoids categorization, while maintaining obvious links to the works of Lynda Benglis and Eva Hesse, enduring touchstones for many contemporary artists. The grids and underlying armatures she employs relate to a Minimalist sensibility. Her use of subdued color and geometric frameworks bring to mind artists such as Agnes Martin and Anne Truitt. Yet, moving beyond the free flowing anti-formalism of Benglis and Hesse, itself in part a feminist reaction to male-dominated art movements, a playful Post-modern openness informs Livingston's practice, permitting diversity as well as, at times, humor and implied narrative. *Stack of Planks*, 2013, for example, resembles a miniature log cabin, while the stitched-together plastic paint fragments of *PQFM*, 2014-15, evoke a Frankenstein-like patchwork. These works are formal, yet funky; oddly attractive, and simultaneously repellant.

Other works in the exhibition are purely formal. *90 Color Tests*, 2012, is a process-oriented, color research exercise undertaken after several years' work in a limited palette. While an artist-in-residence in Bern, Switzerland, Livingston undertook a systematic exploration of color, pouring myriad samples she later configured in a 90-piece grid. Non-representational and glowingly beautiful, the piece holds associative meaning for the artist. Discussing her intent, the artist states: "Some of the works have personal meaning, such as when I use purple, my mother's favorite color, or reference the paneling that was in the playroom of my childhood home. Other pieces engage art history and

popular culture. The *Draped Cube*, 2014, for example, a mash-up between Sol LeWitt and Martha Stewart, playfully covers a Minimalist grid in a literal layer of domesticity. So too, the folded paintings use large swaths of paint to reference Abstract Expressionism, at once engaging and refusing its gestural machismo by folding all its fluid beauty into itself like a blanket.”

Cohesiveness between individual works in the exhibition has been achieved by the artist’s focused consideration of their installation. The rubbery, somewhat glossy surface of the paint is a unifying element, but equally important is the carefully measured space between objects. In effect, the works coalesce into a single work composed of multiple parts. Significant differences in scale, color, and construction become points of interest through juxtaposition. Relationships between objects are often unexpected, expanding our experience of individual pieces. Unlikely bedfellows inform one another: the white mesh grid sags on the wall, a soft, fleshy bas-relief, contrasting with rigid panels of multi-colored, dripped acrylic leaning sturdily against the wall. The linear structure of *Dripline*, 2015, separates more massive sculptures and draws the viewer’s eye up to the gallery ceiling, forcing consider-

ation of the entire space and, in essence, placing the viewer within the sculpture.

Through her insistence on the importance of relationships in her installation, Livingston creates a choreography of forms: non-representational to narrative, colorless to colored, interior to exterior, dense to ephemeral. Her masterful attention to every environmental detail enriches the exhibition, guiding the viewer toward a meditative consideration of the whole, as well as of the component parts. She has discovered a fresh way to honor the contemporary artists who preceded her; especially the feminist artists of the 60s and 70s who re-defined painting by taking it off the canvas. With a gentle vein of humor and a passionate concentration, Livingston embraces new ways to craft the material she loves.

— Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson
The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art



Body of Work, 2014

BIOGRAPHY

Margie Livingston (American, born 1953) earned an MFA degree from the University of Washington in Seattle in 1999. Shortly thereafter she received a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Germany and has since won numerous awards including: a fellowship from Artist Trust and the Washington State Arts Commission; the Betty Bowen Annual Memorial Award, Seattle Art Museum; four-time winner of grants from the Individual Artist Projects program, 4Culture, Seattle; Neddy Artists Fellowship, Tacoma Art Museum; and an Arts Innovator Award, Artists Trust, Seattle. Livingston has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions including: Expanding on an Expanded Subject, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena; Volta Art Fair, New York; Twenty Gallons, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions; Optic Nerve: The Art Of Perception, Tacoma Art Museum; Chamber Music, Frye Art Museum, Seattle; Surface Tension, South Bend Art Museum, Indiana; The Shenzen Work, Shenzen Fine Art Institute, China; and Intersection, Amerika House, Berlin. She also has participated in residency programs in the United States and abroad at: Oregon College of Art and Craft, Portland; Zentrum für Kulturproduktion, Bern, Switzerland; Shenzen Fine Arts Institute, China; and Vermont Studio Center. Livingston was selected as a Finalist for the Portland Art Museum's Contemporary Northwest Art Awards in 2007 and 2015. She is represented by Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.

APEX

An ongoing series of exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists living in the Northwest. Presenting contemporary art in the context of the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Center for Northwest Art, this program continues the Museum's 120-year commitment to exhibiting, collecting, and celebrating the art of the region. APEX is supported in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, and the Exhibition Series Sponsors.

COVER: Draped Painting #14, 2014



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions: Height precedes width precedes depth

Photography by Richard Nicol. *Stack of Planks* photograph by Maggie Carson Romanno. *Body of Work* photograph courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

BIG GRID, 2015

Acrylic paint on string

96 x 96 x ½ inches

Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

FALLING GRID WITH PRUSSIAN BLUE AND RAW SIENNA, 2015

Acrylic paint on string

58 x 45 x 8 ½ inches

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

WHITE DRIPLINE, 2015

Acrylic paint, string, and acetate

180 x 6 x 6 inches

Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

PQFM, 2014-15

Acrylic paint, linen string, polyester cord, coated mesh, plastic boning, plastic rings, and thread

40 x 50 x 3 inches

Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

BODY OF WORK, 2014

Acrylic paint, wood, and metal

58 ¼ x 81 ½ x 12 inches

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

DRAPED PAINTING #14, 2014

Acrylic paint on wooden dowel

24 x 10 x 10 inches

Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery

STACK OF PLANKS, 2013

Acrylic paint

16 ¾ x 23 ½ x 23 ½ inches

Courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

ROUGH-CUT PANELING, DARK, 2013

Acrylic paint on Alupanel

96 1/4 x 48 ¼ x 1 ¼ inches

Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

ROUGH-CUT PANELING, LIGHT, 2013

Acrylic paint on Alupanel

96 ¼ x 48 ¼ x 1 ¼ inches

Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

90 COLOR TESTS, 2012

Acrylic paint and grommets

90 squares, 8 x 8 inches each, 78 x 86 inches installed

Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery