

Red Takes A Train by Karin Cook

Elana Gutmann's alphabet of symbols--the curved line, rounded orb, and fluid drip --. is haunting and emphatic. There is a cadence to her marks, a corporeality made of motion. As in dance, gesture matters, the motion of a limb through the air, a body in space. Gutmann uses her physicality -- working, pressing, scraping, building and taking away to create an environment that invites you to enter.

"Go ahead, touch it," she urges.

So I do, slipping into the cool, mahogany universe of "Circle, Circle". There is something ancient here. Gutmann manages to capture the amber of age, the way skin breathes from the inside, every pore and line revealing the life it's led. Muscle and membrane ripple beneath a polished veneer. When I step back, 'm swirling in copper and teak, yet there is lightness--a hint of peach, pale green, a baby blue stitch under an optimistic acorn-shaped stain. Copper oxidizes, the greening of age. "Circle, Circle" has an old soul.

Elana Gutmann's paintings radiate a kind of wisdom. The intimate relationship of touch over time. Texture dominates her paintings, yet the surfaces are rubbed smooth--a visual trick, which makes your eye go deeper. The interiors are intimate, meditative, yet open. I am drawn in.

"Why so much green?" I wonder aloud and get caught. "Green is a good place." Gutmann responds.

In "To the Shore" and "Joyeuse", green is a good and moody place. Subdued, ethereal, ripe. Dense thickets are interrupted by bolts of action. Pure reptilian magic. Drip, line and gesture converge around orbs of hot light which seem to emanate from the inside. There is nothing quiet in this world, yet all is calm.

"And red?" Gutmann smiles. "Red is why I paint instead of write."

If green is the noun, than red is the verb in Gutmann's active vocabulary. Whether pushing up from within as a persistent stain, making bold swipes and splashes across the center of the canvas, or holding the edge -- red is always engaged. In "No. 4", against a glowing amber background, red takes a train, drops a dish, causes a fight. The life force is visceral. There are bite and claw marks, but no violence. The lines balance the circles; the bright spots dance with the dark, the whole universe is hung in suspense, as if we've opened the door on a child's party. The tumult is life-affirming and familiar. We're home.

The British novelist, G.K. Chesterton writes, "Red is the most joyful and dreadful thing in the physical universe; it is the fiercest note, it is the highest light, it is the place where the walls of this world of ours wears the thinnest and something beyond burns through." In "Source" Gutmann's red is melted, an orange-barnacled pod bursting forth, straining toward the surface, signaling

transition, growth. The way life is expressed here is other-worldly, not extraterrestrial, but of the atmosphere, -- part-planetary, part-sea. But there is no blue to be found, nothing that literal.

Just the churning power of tides.

In her most recent work, Gutmann brings a lighter version of her palette to a series of diptychs and triptychs on wood panels. Inspired by her work in lithography, Gutmann has made a conscious decision to construct surfaces that will "take her mark." The interior language is the same, sweeping curves and fluent lines, but in these pieces, the vocabulary is laid bare, let be. You can follow her simple trail, be in her pale, pale moment. There is an expansiveness in this quiet terrain, a confidence in these narratives. Gutmann's mark is indelible, authentic. We know where she's been.