

ART SEEN: NATIONAL

ANGELINA GUALDONI // ASYA GEISBERG GALLERY

by Nadiah Fellah

Angelina Gualdoni's paintings are works that reward a close look. The fragmented scenes captured on her canvases are at once formally complex and materially simple, depicting images that verge on the figurative, while fading into abstraction in certain passages. Gualdoni says of her current work: "I [want] to make the physicality of the painting much more pronounced in this series. The idea of seeing an image at one distance, and it dissipating as you move closer, has always interested me." [1]



Installation View, Held in Place, Light in Hand, 2014

Many of the paintings on view at her current exhibition *Held in Place, Light in Hand*, at Asya Geisberg Gallery in New York, have an almost photographic quality to their compositions. Works such as *Opal Hours* and *Without a Net to Catch the Days* are evocative of the play of shadows cast through windowpanes, whereas *Rooms* mimics the bokeh, or out-of-focus area captured in a photograph, implying that what is in the foreground lies just outside of the lens's depth of field. This aesthetic similarity is no coincidence, as Gualdoni often uses photos as source material for her paintings. She says that she was initially trained as a photographer, and when she began painting, found poignant similarities between "the idea of a how a picture is developed [and] how pigment settles."



Ballast, 2013. Oil, acrylic, and oil pastel on canvas, 38" x 36"

Created by a process in which Gualdoni pours thinned paint on canvas, she then works to form images from the natural flows and pooling of pigments. While her previous works have largely been abstract in nature, her most recent paintings have grown from the artist's increasing interest in how objects are represented in space. Playing on the medium's deep-rooted still-life tradition, her intention is to push the norms of that tradition in new directions, upsetting the stable relationships between figure and ground, "When I started this [series] the idea of freshness was really important to me. But as I worked longer, creating tension between a light or graceful ground and a more aggressive mark became more interesting. I wanted the works to have that range to them, and that dialogue of mark-making [within them]."



Rooms, 2013, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 47" x 52"

In taking the still-life genre as her point of departure, Gualdoni also adds a subversive element to its established associations with domesticity and femininity. By challenging the stable figure-ground relationship of still-life compositions, she implies a fluidity within traditional gender roles, and resists the assumption that the feminine can be collapsed into the domestic. The analogy of using spilled liquid pigment as a metaphor for the drips, flows, and seepages of the female body also place her work in a long line of feminist artist's practices, from Pat Steir to Lynda Benglis.



Little Vacuum, 2013, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 30" x 24"

In addition, Gualdoni cites twentieth-century painter Sonia Delaunay as an inspiration, and the geometric shapes and bold colors the artist was known for. Her influence can be seen in the reoccurring triangular patterns included in many of the show's works, like *Night Loom* and *Always on the Other Side*. She says it was also instructive to think of how female artists working in Delaunay's time had to develop fluid identities in order to operate in and navigate a male-dominated art world. However, Gualdoni's work departs from this influence, as well as Steir's and Benglis's, through their quasi-objectivity – effectively creating haunting passages that just border on recognition.



Night Loom, 2013, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 31" x 24"

Angelina Gualdoni: *Held in Place, Light in Hand* is on view at Asya Geisberg Gallery in New York through February 15, 2014.

Nadiyah Fellah is a doctoral student of Art History at the Graduate Center, CUNY in New York.

[1] All quotes are taken from Christopher Joy and Zachary Keeting's interview with the artist.