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in New York City

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5.23.12 — NEGOTIATING THE ROOM

Topics: Inside Outside, Jade Townsend, Lesley Heller, Outside In

First the bad news. For a long time after Abstract Expressionism, it was a bit harder to get taken seriously without working large. On the good side, one could do it without literally making history. One did not have to repaint *Guernica*, Diego Rivera and the Mexican revolution, or (heaven forbid) Thomas Hart Benton. One could stick to geometry and impulse. One could stick to what one knew.

How about, though, painting what one saw? Even if one accepts Pop Art as just that, it took longer to map one's environment. Maybe it took getting over suburban sprawl, but it has started to happen big time. The impulse underlies urban graffiti art, the imaginary architecture of Sarah Sze or Julie Mehretu, and the real landscapes of Tacita Dean. Each of the artists in "Inside Outside, Outside In," Lesley Heller through May 25, has something in common with all three. The scenes all look familiar, in plain ink and washes, but they move within what

Olafur Eliasson once called *Your Negotiable Panorama*.

Negotiating can mean either dealing with another person or navigating a space. Dawn Clements obliged a viewer to do both, when she drew the huge black namesake of the Boiler at Pierogi on facing walls (and she slipped back this very month as part of yet another competitor to yet another set of New York art fairs). Now she suggests something more intimate, as close and reassuring as a kitchen table by Janet Fish. She calls it *Jessica Drummond's Bedroom Wall (My Reputation, 1945)*, and a bedroom can hold all sorts of reputations. Actually, the subtitle names a 1946 film, with Drummond played by Barbara Stanwyck. Apparently, she can take a cue from nature in telling stories and a cue from stories while at home.

All four artists draw what they see, but their stories come with footnotes. Each of Theresa Ganz's brown wreaths consists of cut photographs, but the warmth is real. So, for that matter, is the winter dryness. The other two artists create meticulous panoramas, but their urban planning, too, is deceptive. They cut and paste fragments of the outdoors. Assembly and disassembly definitely required.



Björn Meyer-Ebrecht displays what look like taped architectural photographs, but with drawings and actual tape. Fran Siegel riddles her cyan ink washes with gaps and tears. His schools and playgrounds stand empty. Highways cross her cities seen from above. Both extend the gallery interior to a chilly ideal. Maybe this is as close as Orchard Street comes to nature or to terror.

One has a real interior to cross on the way in, and Jade Townsend makes it a challenge. For a first obstacle or partition, one faces a large wrapped canvas, supported by legs lacking a head or torso. Then come a van and a small chamber lacking its Sheetrock—the whole surrounded by thick red verticals, somewhere between gestural brushwork and studs. Oh, and the walls hold pretend antique cartoons featuring circus performers and other controlling forces. All this has something to do with "Leviathan," somehow identified with everyone's favorite Great White Whale. I doubt it makes much sense, but if this is what happens with an art mover as an installation's prime mover, so be it.

